

RAPID STRESS MITIGATION FAQ



I'm pretty anxious. Is that OK?

Yes, you are joining millions of others when it comes to unprecedented worry and uncertainty. It might help to be aware of when you are engaged in “adaptive anxiety,” which leads you to think through situations beforehand to protect you from being caught off guard. And be aware of “maladaptive anxiety” in which you ruminate on something that you cannot change or is highly unlikely to happen. Here is a whole YouTube playlist for COVID-19 oriented anxiety relief by Dr. J. Brewer: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6sRqjtLfITni7oXKpSj2cQ9290lkpKH>

My stress comes in waves. My moods swing throughout the day. Is that normal?

This isn't unusual, and there are ways to reduce the intensity of such waves/swings. First try to be aware of when your mood is swinging so you don't unintentionally take it out on others. Be proactive - try committing yourself to a daily routine of using a short stress-coping technique. Set a timer or phone alarm to remind yourself to stop and take a calming break. Focusing on deep breathing can be done in even just 30-seconds. Tag one song in your playlist that is your signal to detach and decompress. Step out on your balcony or porch, if possible, and have a few minutes of fresh air and sunlight. Three times a day can make a difference. And remember others are likely feeling the same mood swings. Be patient, don't take it personally if they lash out, and try to show everyone some grace.

How do I make time to detach or decompress during a busy day in which I'm putting out fires and just trying to deal with coping with the craziness?

No one can make time, nor can anyone afford to skip this. We suggest you have to take the time so that you can run this marathon. Running this as a sprint with lungs screaming for oxygen is not sustainable. And, as noted above, the time commitment doesn't have to be huge. Even 3, 5, or 10 minute breaks during the day can make a big difference. The consistency of practicing calming techniques daily is more effective than a large quantity of time in spurts.

I have a diagnosed mental health condition, and I wonder how I will make it through this crisis.

The morbidity of the pandemic, jarring social behaviors and institutional breakdowns can all trigger old and new emotional reactions. It is crucial to check in with your treater(s) to let them know how you are coping. Your EAP likely has excellent services that can work with concerns that arise in relation to your diagnosis. This subject is also addressed in this webpage supported by the American Psychiatric Association: <http://workplacemantalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19>

I don't feel much of anything. Is that a problem?

It does not serve anyone to stigmatize or pathologize any one category of reactions. Some people have developed a thicker skin to particular circumstances. Some people are said to thrive in crises. Feeling nothing can be experienced by others as tone-deaf, so it may interfere with social interactions, trust-building or leadership/followership. It can help to say something like, "Somehow I'm coping ok with this, but I'm paying attention to the various ways we are all struggling."

I'm having difficulty sleeping. Is this normal? What can I do?

Sleep is tough for many, but especially now. You may know all the standard advice around sleep hygiene; here is our rundown: try to maintain the same sleep time, refuse to look at flickering screens for the hour before you sleep, and have something in your bedroom that reminds you of your best self. For those of you who want to bring in some reinforcements, try the following:

- a. Any calming breathing technique
- b. An active sequence of yoga postures: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L19upn4t9n8>
- c. A passive guided meditation called a yoga nidra in which you listen while you lie still in bed and drift to sleep: <https://www.greenleafintegrative.com/2019/09/yoga-nidra-with-tanpura-drone/>

I want to stay informed but watching/reading the news makes me more anxious. How do I find the balance?

Let's make this question a special case of the first question in this FAQ. Which news is helping you be adaptive? Which news is helping you to make decisions? Perhaps you decide to read the news platform that summarizes everything you like to know about (and limit it to 5-10 minutes), and then resist the temptation to click on any hyperlink that has a sensational title. Those sensational titles prey on your vigilance in maladaptive ways. Notice which news causes you to be stuck in rumination. Notice which news takes you down a road straight into an emotional traffic jam. And don't forget to smile at yourself for getting stuck once in a while -- we're only human.