

How Can Self-Care Sustain You Through the Covid-19 Crisis?

Self-quarantines. Social distancing. Events canceled. Working from home. Kids home from school. Conflicting information. Deep worry for aging parents and immune-suppressed loved ones.

Let's own what we're feeling right now: as a global community, we have never seen anything like this. There's been a lot of change, very quickly. Disruptions to our daily life, uncertain economic impact on our industries,

and fear and uncertainty about our health are surfacing tremendous amounts of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and stress. And the more stress we feel, the more quickly the primitive parts of our brain take over. Stress is the antidote to calm, rational thought, focus, and peace. It's more important now than ever to protect the one thing we have control over: our mental well-being. Our well-being is multi-dimensional, so we have multiple entry points on taking care of it.

Here are four ways you can recover, reconnect, and face your anxiety by leveraging your body, mind, heart, and soul.



- **BODY: GET MOVING. Move your body: it's that simple.** Take a walk, ride your bike, do some yoga in the living room, hold a plank between conference calls, watch one of many free online fitness videos offered right now, do some jumping jacks: anything you can do to get the body moving and the serotonin flowing. Exercise and regular movement are closely tied to mental well-being – a little sweat therapy goes a long way in a time like this, and can help you ward off the stress. Need a specific idea? Try the [Johnson & Johnson 7-Minute Workout App](#): it's free, easy to use, can be customized to your needs, and best of all, can be used at home!
- **MIND: GET DISCONNECTED. Try to quiet the mind by narrowing your field of vision on the Covid news.** There is an overwhelm of bad information, hysteria, fear mongering, and “Negative Nancy’s” out there right now, and social media can make things exponentially worse. Ask yourself if the people, sites, or apps you're viewing are serving you well in this time. Sites like [CDC](#), [WHO](#), or local trusted government sites can provide useful, current, and unbiased information that will help you and others stay safe. If a site isn't serving you well unfollow and block them rather than mindlessly scroll and allow others to fuel negative emotions and anxiety inside of you. When you do come across information or people who bring you anxiety and fear, **stop and take 10 deep breaths**. Remember that fear and anxiety are survival emotions – we are responding to a perceived threat in our environment, which is a natural biological reaction in every human. Breathing deeply will move you from reaction to response. Need a tool to help

with intentional, focused breathing? Try the [Calm app](#) – it has great guided meditations and notification reminders to keep you on track. If you have more time, try [Meditative Story podcast](#), which combines extraordinary human stories with meditation prompts.

- **HEART: GET PRESENT. Set a reminder a few times a day to pause and take inventory of your emotions in that moment.** Are they negative? Positive? Serving you well? If they aren't, take a moment to recover: take a walk, a deep breath, stretch, phone a trusted friend or loved one, list a few things you're grateful for (this also comes in handy during that long :20 of hand washing!), or try to take a new perspective on the source of your negative emotion. In times like these our awareness of our emotions in the moment and our perspective will make or break us. Being intentional about keeping a positive perspective increases your resilience and ability to respond to stressful situations in a healthy way. Need a tip? Put a Post-it note on your mirror as a reminder while brushing your teeth to take inventory of your emotions. This intentional practice will increase your self-awareness and ability to pivot to self-care in the moments you feel anxiety throughout the day.

Want to level up on this? Get a coworker, friend, or family member to do this with you. These "team" check-ins on the heart can deepen connection and community and help those around you connect with their emotions. Not only that, helping others reinforces these practices for you.

Need some good reading material in this area? Try this great read: [Rising Strong, by Brene Brown](#) to improve your stress and resilience game.

- **SOUL: GET CONNECTED (in a good way). Find something during this time to feed your soul – and feed it regularly.** Whether it's prayer, devotions, guided meditations, or simply connecting with others (which, based on the research, is THE most powerful contributor to your mental health), weave intentional connection with people and things that fill your soul throughout your day. Don't think of this as social distancing but rather physical distancing – you can be physically distant from others while still being social and connected. Remember: connection with others is an INTEGRAL biological need for us humans. Need an idea on how to maintain connection while physical distancing? Create a private Facebook group or email chain and enlist your close friends, family members, colleagues, etc. to post encouraging, positive messages or quotes to the group. Or, set up a weekly video meeting to connect and talk through any stress or anxiety. Consider doing live streams with close friends and do a virtual "workout" together.

Here are some other suggestions on keeping your stress and anxiety at bay:

- **Look to the heroes:** Look for stories on people who are on the frontlines of this virus: healthcare workers, scientists, first responders, and any others who voluntarily put themselves in harm's way and isolate themselves for weeks from loved ones to protect us, the public. When we hear these types of stories, we feel warm, optimistic, and it

actually encourages us to continue fighting to be other-centered and help prevent the spread ourselves. Rather than focus on the fear and what's going wrong, redirect your attention to those who are doing the right thing – this will help curb the anxious feelings and inspire us to do better ourselves.

- **Show gratitude:** *Look for ways to express gratitude to others. Send notes, emails, shop for your elderly neighbor, mow a neighbor's lawn, thank your mailperson. Expressing gratitude encourages the release of positive, feel-good neurotransmitters that actually help improve your immune system, and that of the person you're helping. This is the kind of "viral spread" we need!*
- **Show compassion:** *At a time when people are hoarding toilet paper, making prejudice remarks, casting blame, or indulging in self-protective behavior, be the light that shines in the darkness by expressing compassion toward others. Trying to find a common humanity—even with the toilet paper hoarders!—actually helps all of us solve these complex issues, stay united, and will temper your anxiety.*
- **Schedule "Worry Journal" time:** *Schedule time to jot down your worries, fears and anxieties – by tracking your emotions, fears, worries, and anxieties and on paper, you can use journaling as a tool to offload these negative feelings and thoughts. By scheduling this time, you can stop yourself from incessant rumination throughout the day. When a worrisome thought surfaces, tell yourself to "get back to that" at your designated Worry Journal time. Just don't schedule worry journaling just before bed, when mental clutter or worry can often prevent a good night's sleep.*

Remember, you've got this: don't forget to prioritize your own mental well-being during a time like this. Take a deep breath, shift your perspective, and hang in there: we will come out the other end of this stronger, more resilient, and more connected.

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