



# COVID 19 Strategies to Manage Stress

STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE OF  
UNPREDICTABILITY AND CHAOS

M. Nisar , MD Psychiatrist

# COVID 19 - Impact on your life

- ▶ Work
- ▶ Home
- ▶ General Routine
- ▶ Children
- ▶ Stress Levels
- ▶ Unpredictability
- ▶ Perception of Others
- ▶ Perception of Life



# General Coping Skills

## Focus on

- **Physical Self**
- **Emotional Self**
- **Relationships**
- **Other things in Life**

## Basic Routine with a Structure

Designated times

- Sleep Hygiene
- Make and plan your healthy Meals
- Exercise
- Meditate and Pray

## TOOLS TO WORK ON EMOTIONS

- Expressing your emotions to people who you trust.
- Validating and Supporting Others
- Being mindful of your emotions throughout the day .
- Engaging in self compassion and setting limits
- Connecting with those we love each day

# General Coping Skills

## Cognitive

- Recognizing when your thinking is being influenced by your emotional state (Being Mindful)
- Automatic Negative Thoughts
- Recognizing when our behavior is contributing to negative emotional states.
- Practice State Changing Techniques

## Environmental

- Keep a clean and organized environment
- Identify factors in our environment that are contributing to our stress and eliminate them if possible
- Change your environment if feeling too stressed out

# Social Distancing

## Concerns

- Maintaining social distancing can be a very isolating and difficult situation
- This may raise tensions at home, create loneliness, feeling constrained
- You may feel more isolated from your co-workers as well due to social distancing rules

## Coping Skills

- Find ways to get outdoors/get out of the house that are still safe
- Start a project in your yard or around your apartment
- Connect with friends online as others may feel isolated as well
- Increase virtual communication with co-workers. Leave them fun digital notes/memes

# Loss of Routine

## Concerns

- Most people have felt a disruption in their day to day routine as a result of the virus
- Both in terms of their job and home life
- Extra precautions
- Not being able to get resources

## Coping Skills

- Creating a new routine
- Taking initiative to set up routines with co-workers
- Accepting the idea that some things won't get done (plates will drop)
- Talking with boss about expectations and priorities

# Sharing our Patients' Fears Concerns

- Many of our patients are sharing their fears of the virus
- In fact, this seems to be the only thing people are talking about
- We as providers may also have some of the same fears

## Coping Skills

- Recognizing our own catastrophized thoughts (thinking about worst possible outcome)
- Being mindful of how much distress we are absorbing
- It's okay to acknowledge your own fears with a patient (in a professional way).
- Allowing yourself to take a break from talking about it (reserving empathy)

# Putting on a Tough Face

## Concerns

- Often there can be pressure within healthcare to be “tough” and work through pressure
- This is appropriate and necessary at times, but also can lead to burn out
- Realizing that the person who is burned out is often the last to know
- This can also lead to mistakes being made

## Coping Skills

- Paying attention to your body – signs of tension
- Openly discussing burn out and feeling tired
- Not giving in to the feeling that if you don't do it, "it won't be done right"
- Making the active choice to disengage



# Home Life being Disrupted

## Concerns

- Home is often our escape from the day- to-day stress of work
- Some of us are having to work from home or manage children/partners/dependents at home
- Many of us are not able to visit family that are out of the state

## Coping Skills

- Being mindful that you can only do the best you can
- Accept the idea that you are not going to be a perfect parent right now
- Remember everyone is managing this with children right now. People will understand
- Speak with your boss about your specific family needs

# Fear of Contamination/Contaminating Others

## ▶ Concerns

- Many of us are thinking about everything we touch and do, in an unprecedented way
- We all should all have greater empathy
- ▶ for OCD - Germaphobia
- This can make us hypervigilant, and we may look for soothing behaviors such as washing hands or showers as means of feeling better
- We may feel guilty about going out or doing things, like we are contributing to the problem.

## Coping Skills

- Recognizing that going out is a necessity at times, and that this is okay
- Being mindful of when we are over-analyzing our own behavior. Everything does not have Corona Virus on it
- We are not in complete control of our ability to control contamination, no matter what we do
- If your hands are turning red or developing sores you may be over washing

# Feeling the Impact of a Fluctuating System / Lack of Information

## Concerns

- Things are changing rapidly at different levels
  - Clinic
  - University
  - City
  - State
  - Nationally
  - Globally



## Coping Skills

- Take breaks from emails
- Assume positive intent by others, everyone is trying their best
- Recognize other people's lives are also being disrupted and their communication style may have changed as a result
- Over time things will normalize again
- Radical acceptance<sup>11</sup> (accepting the idea that no control is okay)

# Impact of Misinformation / Overload of Information

## Concerns

- The media is invested in making profit through viewership and clicks
- Information is being sensationalized at times
- Some information is simply false
- This can be frustrating as a provider

## Coping Skills

- Be aware of your own media consumption – this impacts your mood
- Disengage from social media
- Read beyond headlines
- Take breaks from the news
- Do not spread information until it is confirmed

# Microaggressions and Racism

## Concerns

- The fact that the virus originated in China has contributed to prejudice behaviors and microaggressions
- May result in patients being insensitive to certain providers of racial and cultural backgrounds

## Coping Skills

- Check in with each other and create a sense of community around discussing stigma
- Do your best to educate patients when possible
- BELIEVE people when they experienced a negative interaction related to their race/cultural background
- Validate that this was not fair, and check in to see how people are feeling about it later in the week

# Loss of Self-Care Activities/Routines

## Concerns

- Normally we do all kinds of things to take care of ourselves
- Unfortunately, many of these activities involve being around others and have been cancelled

## Coping Skills

- Get CREATIVE!
- Use YouTube to do exercise, meditation, and mindfulness at home
- Get a video game that involves exercise
- Read those books you have wanted to read
- Go for a walk
- Talk to friends online and connect
- Start a project!

# High-Risk Group Providers

## Concerns

- Providers over 65 or immuno-compromised provider may have greater fear of contracting the infection
- Same with those of us with loved ones who are immunocompromised
- We also may be fearful of contaminating these populations ourselves

## Coping Skills

- If you don't feel comfortable doing something, tell your manager
- Ask co-workers for help if you feel like you are at greater risk
- Volunteer to be an identified helper who can jump in if someone needs help

# Having Special Events Cancelled

## Concerns

- In the wake of social distancing many events have been cancelled or postponed
- This includes sports, conferences, vacations, and even weddings
- This can produce a sense of grief or loss that feels unfair

## Coping Skills

- You are not alone in feeling this way!
- Don't fall into the trap of feeling like this is a "first world problem" and not allowing yourself to grieve. It's okay to be disappointed
- The process of making changes can bring people together
- More time can make some events even better



# Talking to Kids about Corona Virus

## ▶ Coping Skills

- Talk with your children about the topic
- Focus on things that are going to stay the same (being together, being loved, supporting each other)
- Come up with daily routines and
  - ▶ rituals for your children
- Recognize how your own anxiety may
  - ▶ be effecting your children

## Concerns

- Children may be struggling to
  - understand what is happening (just like we are), except they have less agency to manage their lives
- Being out of school and out of their routine can be difficult for many kids

# Enjoy Small Wins

- No traffic!
- Short lines at most take out restaurants
- Lightened/simplified workload in some ways
- A break in routine can be invigorating
- Systems are becoming more flexible
- Telemedicine is being moved forward quickly
- We are developing protocols for managing our patients