

Coping with COVID-19: Self-Care While Social Distancing

First, we believe that it is important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic is a significant life stressor for many, and it is having a significant impact on people across the globe. The consequences of this public health emergency can challenge our ability to cope and affect our mental health and well-being in a number of different ways. For example, you may be experiencing some uncertainty about the future, which is leading you to feeling scared and anxious. You may be feeling lonely as social distancing and the move to online modes of working, teaching, learning, and communicating have limited or changed the nature of your interactions with others. Maybe you feel angry, upset, or disappointed about events being cancelled. Perhaps you are having trouble sleeping, feeling distracted, having difficulty concentrating, or feeling less productive than usual.

Reputable practitioners and mental health organizations around the world agree that these feelings are **normal**. Although there are steps we can take to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our mental health, it is important to acknowledge that we **will** feel the impacts of this stressor, and to be kind and patient with ourselves when we do.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Eat regular meals.

Even if things have slowed down and you have been less active than usual, it is still important to nourish your body and mind. Try to eat regularly, including meals and snacks. Do your best to maintain balance in your diet, while also eating food that you enjoy. Have fun with cooking - try a new recipe or take an online cooking class! In addition to eating well and often, make sure that you stay hydrated.

Move your body.

Stretch, go for a walk, do a home workout – move your body in a way that you enjoy and feels good for you. There are plenty of free online resources including classes hosted over Facebook, Instagram Live, and Zoom. Some resources have become available specifically in response to COVID-19 pandemic, such as the Down Dog apps, which are offered for free until May 1st. See here for more details:

<https://www.downdogapp.com>.

A quick search on Google or YouTube search will yield even more possibilities!

Get enough sleep.

You may have noticed that your sleep has been affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether it be the result of anxiety, lifestyle changes, or a lack of routine. Adequate sleep is not only important in terms of concentration, productivity, and academic success, but also has a significant impact on our health and well-being. The following are some tips that may help improve your sleep:

- *Set consistent sleep and waking times*

- *Develop a before-bed routine to “cue” your body*
 - Have a shower or bath, brush your teeth, stretch, read, etc.
 - You can also try relaxation exercises such as deep breathing or meditation
- *Create a comfortable sleep environment*
 - Comfortable bedding, adequate temperature, and blocking out noise and light can improve sleep
 - Some people find lavender oil to be relaxing and aid sleep
- *Make your bed a “sleep-only zone”*
 - Avoid eating, watching TV, playing video games, doing work, etc. from bed
- *Put away electronics before bed, and keep them out of your room, if possible*
- *Avoid napping during the day, if possible*
 - If you must nap, try to limit daytime naps to 20-30 minutes
- *Avoid caffeine, other stimulants, and alcohol in the few hours before bed*
 - Alcohol may help you fall asleep, but can cause you to wake up in the night
- *Avoid rich, heavy, fried, or spicy foods before bed*
 - Or other foods that may upset your stomach
- *Get exposure to natural light during the day*
- *Exercise in the late afternoon or early evening*
 - Strenuous exercise too close to bedtime can interfere with sleep
- *If you can’t fall asleep after 20 or 30 minutes, try something else*
 - Get out of bed and read something boring until you feel sleepy
 - Do a sleep meditation or listen to relaxing music or sounds
 - Check out the Calm and Simple Habit apps under the Resources heading below!
 - Drink a warm, de-caffeinated drink
- *Start with a small change, practice consistency, and be patient*
 - You don’t need to make all of these changes all at once!

More information can be found here, or by searching for “sleep hygiene” tips:

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/SleepHygiene.pdf>

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/getting/overcoming/tips/>

Take breaks and find enjoyment.

Though you may find that working remotely has provided you with more free time, it is important that you do not use all of this extra time for work. In addition to using extra time to meet basic needs such as eating, sleeping, moving your body, and attending to your personal hygiene, it is also important that you use time to enjoy yourself or have fun. Rediscover a hobby you once enjoyed or teach yourself a new skill. Take advantage of the growing options of free Internet content amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, including virtual concerts, trivia events, games, and happy hours. Taking breaks and doing things that you enjoy can not only boost your mood and improve your mental health, but can also help make time spent doing work more productive.

Connect with others.

Just because we are supposed to be keeping our distance from others does not mean we need to be completely disconnected from our friends, families, and colleagues. In addition to phone calls, texting, and social media, there are plenty of other ways that allow you to have virtual face-to-face contact while maintaining distance from others. FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom all appear to be popular video calling technologies. As Brock students, you also have free access to Microsoft Teams and Lifesize. Microsoft Teams is one of the Office 365 applications can be accessed via SharePoint. To download Lifesize, and for more information, see here: <https://brocku.ca/information-technology/info/audio-visual-services/video-conferencing/desktop-video-conferencing/>.

In addition to using these technologies to arrange hangouts with friends, group study sessions, or lab meetings, you can also choose a friend to be your “coworker” for the day. Social distancing may be causing you to miss out on conversations and interactions with friends, classmates, and colleagues, which may be affecting you more than you realize. Having a “coworker” for the day can allow you both to do your own work while keeping each other motivated and having someone to chat with intermittently.

It is also important to stay in touch with your instructors, supervisor, committee members, and Graduate Program Director to ensure you are up to date on changes in program delivery arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Use coping strategies to manage anxiety.

Some anxiety is an expected response during uncertain times. However, it is important to find ways to manage anxiety. Common relaxation techniques used to manage anxiety include deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness exercises. If you feel that you cannot relax, you may want to try to distract yourself in by watching a television show you enjoy, picking a category (e.g. animals) and naming something in that category from A-Z, or using the 5-4-3-2-1 method (see image below). If you feel that you can't relax or manage your anxiety on your own, it may be important to reach out to both personal and professional supports.

The 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique

Ease your state of mind in stressful moments.

Acknowledge **5** things that you can see around you.



Acknowledge **4** things that you can touch around you.



Acknowledge **3** things that you can hear around you.

Acknowledge **1** thing that you can taste around you.



Acknowledge **2** things that you can smell around you.



#DeStressMonday

DeStressMonday.org

DE STRESS
MONDAY

Reach out for support when needed.

If you feel that you need support, please do not hesitate to reach out. Although in-person appointments for Personal Counselling, Student Health Services, and Student Accessibility Services have been suspended, you can still access each of these services remotely. See the following links for more information:

<https://brocku.ca/health-wellness-accessibility/personal-counselling-services/>

<https://brocku.ca/health-wellness-accessibility/student-health-services/>

<https://brocku.ca/health-wellness-accessibility/sas/>

Resources

Additionally, there are a number of support resources online or in the community that you can access. Please visit their websites for information about how they are offering services during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for contact information.

Headspace app

<https://www.headspace.com>

Calm app

<https://www.calm.com>

Simple Habit app

<https://www.simplehabit.com>

Big White Wall

<https://www.bigwhitewall.com/?lang=en-ca>

Good2Talk

<https://good2talk.ca>

1-866-925-5454

Morneau Shepell

1-833-BROCK33

Mental Health & Addictions Line

<http://accesslineniagara.com>

1-866-550-5205

Community Addiction Services of Niagara (CASON)

<http://cason.ca>

Niagara Distress Centre

<http://distresscentreniagara.com>

905-688-3711

COAST Niagara

<https://cmhaniagara.ca/coast-niagara/>

1-866-550-5205, and press 1

For more information and suggestions about coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and taking care of yourself while maintaining social distance, see the following resources:

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19>

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19#coping>

<https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/covid-19-and-anxiety>

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpi-disaster-pandemic-covid-19-and-your-mental-health.pdf>

<https://mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse832ce>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>