

Advanced Primary Care COVID-19 Newsletter Series



The Pandemic and Stress follow up

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Since our last APC newsletter on stress and COVID-19, it has been observed that there has been an increased in stress for all of us. This increase is due to a number of factors:

- Daily update by local health authority on the rising number of COVID-19 cases creates fear and anxiety.
- Confusion and lack of reliable information about COVID-19.
- Uncertainty on the duration of the pandemic.
- Disruption of daily routine with school and daycare closures and employers sending workers home to work from home.
- Social distancing during the pandemic creates social isolation from family and friends.
- Financial stress with layoffs, income loss from self-isolation.
- Social isolation from practicing social distancing in the attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19.

This pandemic related stress is normal and is unpleasant and can impact our physical health especially our immune system and make us susceptible to COVID-19 and/or other illnesses. It is also important for us to recognize and maintain our mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to improve our overall well-being.

How do I know I am stressed?



The first step to manage your stress is to **recognize** the signs of stress early on. It is common to miss these signs early, even if you notice these signs, it is tempting for us to ignore them or think we can manage them by brushing them under the rug. The danger in this tactic is that it doesn't allow you to tackle the problem head on, and the catalyst of time can cause you to miss the crucial moment to intervene before your stress becomes overwhelming.

Stress creates an imbalance in our emotional state, the ability to recognize this imbalance is essential to understand and manage your emotions. If you skip the phase of acknowledging that you are **stressed**, you will impede your ability to manage your stress.

Below it a list of signs and symptoms of stress:

- Sadness, confusion, irritability, **anger**, uneasiness, and even **suicidal** thoughts, in particular those who suffers from depression and other mental illness.
- Reduced **concentration**, efficiency and **productivity**.
- **Social withdrawal** and **isolation**.

- **Interpersonal problems** (e.g. defensiveness, communication problem, increase conflict)
- Tension (e.g., headaches, jaw clenching, teeth grinding)
- Body pain (e.g., headaches, muscle spasms)
- Reduced energy (e.g., tiredness, weakness, fatigue, lacking motivation)
- **Sleeping** problems (e.g., insomnia, nightmares)

What can I do during this stressful pandemic?

Know your tolerance

When you pay attention to your stress management, you will notice a pattern that will signal your threshold of tolerance. It is helpful to pay attention to trends of what makes your stress better or worse. It is beneficial to do a **regular check** on your emotions in order to avoid overlooking your stress.

Limit your consumption of news and updates. Refining your information to reputable sources, setting a time for when you can check the news, and limiting updates you explore with the individuals in your life. Creating these limitations can be helpful to reduce the amount of stress you let into your life.

Practice self-care

Self-care is the active process of acknowledging and tending to your needs. This includes measures such as eating nutritious foods, staying active, and getting adequate rest.

When you are stressed, you require a specific form of intervention self-care: coping. Your coping mechanisms are the methods that you use to moderate your stress. Therefore, if you pay attention to the symptoms that arise when you are stressed, you may find clues into the right coping mechanisms for you.

For example, if you find yourself increasingly angry, irritable, or involved in more personal conflicts you may tailor your self care by giving yourself a break from work, doing enjoyable activities with your family or doing relaxation activities such as meditation. If you are showing signs of confusion, body aches, and fatigue you might need ample sleep.



Draw on your past coping practices which were successful when you are stressed. What coping skills in the past helped to ground you at that time? Past coping practices that have been deemed successful may be helpful in the present as well.

For self-care, the more strategies you have in your toolkit, the better. Having a plethora of options allows you to be better equipped to handle your stress.

If your go-to coping skills are difficult to use in the context of COVID-19 precautions, be creative. Instead shift your focus to the coping mechanisms that you can do such as:

- Craft /hobbies which you have neglected because of your busy life.
- Meditate / doing a yoga class with online class.
- Do your spring cleaning earlier or do the decluttering that you have wanted to do but have no time

- Play and spend time with your children or your pet
- Read a book.
- Connect with all your love ones virtually by face time, skype etc.
- Watch your favorite movie or movies/ series that your friends or family have recommended
- Practice daily gratitude
- Take an online class
- Host a virtual gathering

It is important to know that your children can also have stress during the pandemic. Regardless of their age, their behaviour can be off. Younger children tend to have more temper tantrums while older children, teenagers might react to the pandemic stress with withdrawal, anger and/or anxiety.

It is important for parents to understand that these behaviours are normal in the setting of stress. Listen, be patient and reassure them things will be okay.

I recommend that you refer to a previous newsletter by Dr. Kiely Williams on what to do with your children during COVID-19 pandemic.

What can I do to minimize stress while I am in self-isolation or quarantine?

Self-isolation and quarantine can be very stressful for someone. Not only are we socially isolated from friends and family, we also worry about the stigma of being self-isolated or quarantined.

There are things you can do to minimize your stress while you are in quarantine or self-isolation:

1. Maintain contact with the outside world virtually such as email, phone, text, face time. You can reconnect your friends and family who are currently living overseas via WhatsApp.
2. Maintain your exercise routine by working out at home. Motivate yourself, your family, friends by creating an online exercise challenge.
3. Read books that you've intended to but just didn't have time. If you have a book club, maintain your meeting by having a virtual meeting.
4. Commune with nature. Walking around outside alone or with your family or pet in the sun at a healthy distance from others is very therapeutic.
5. Cook, check out new recipes on YouTube and test it out at home. Share the recipes with family and friends
6. Maintain contact with friends that are in the same situation as you are and share coping tips. For example, if you are home schooling your children, maintain virtual contacts with other parents to see what works for them



No doubt the COVID-19 pandemic is a very challenging time for all of us, by uniting and helping each other during this time of difficulty, we can look back and be proud of ourselves.

Together, we will stop the spread of COVID-19 – Your APC Care Team