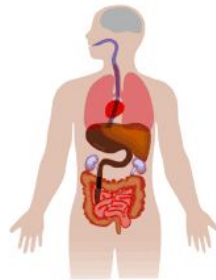


Greetings everyone,

Given this time of uncertainty and change, it is common for us to respond with anxiety and fear, often getting stuck in a perpetual cycle of worry, tension, and rumination.

While we all take the practical physical health recommendations of hand washing, sanitizing, and social distancing to manage the spread of the illness, we also need to pay attention to our mental health during this time. Here are some ideas for things you can practice, even within the comfort of your own home. Remember the mind, body, and soul are connected; so attending to the wellness of each component can have an exponential effect on our overall state.

The Body



We cannot effectively manage stress and worry without getting our body involved. Our nervous system is designed to detect and respond to perceived threat – this is its primary job and it has had a LONG time (think evolution) to get this right. Understanding what our nervous system is designed to do and why it does this will allow you to interpret your physiological reactions without pathologizing them. The ability to notice and interpret our nervous system's responses can ultimately give you the power to regulate the reactions that arise, coming back to a state of safety in your body.

Understanding the Basics of the Nervous System: here, knowledge is a huge part of the battle. Learn to translate your nervous system's dialogue with you by watching this easy to understand (and entertaining) video:

- [The Polyvagal Theory: The New Science of Safety and Trauma by Seth Porges](#)

Utilizing the Breath: sometimes we think breathing is simple. We do it all day long, right? However, when we truly breathing correctly, utilizing all areas of our lungs, reaching the air down into the diaphragm, moving the belly in and out the impact is tremendous. Spending even five minutes focusing on inhaling through the nose, exhaling through the mouth (make it audible!) can make a world of difference for your body, mind and soul. For an extra bit of fun, focus on breathing in something

you need or want (peace, calm) and exhaling something you don't need to hold onto (fear, anxiety, anger).

Grounding the body: times of stress pull our awareness into our minds and out of our bodies, which means out of the present moment. When you notice this happening, bring your attention back to the body and the present moment by engaging all of your five senses. Using the physical space around you, name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell or taste, and finally 1 thing you appreciate about yourself in this moment. For an extra dose of grounding, wiggle your toes and heels into the floor, feeling the solidness, softness, texture, or temperature of the ground as it connects with your feet.

Exercise and yoga: although many people are choosing not to go to gyms or classes right now, it is important to continue moving our bodies, getting our heart rates up and engaging our muscles. Try out these ideas for at-home movement:

- Yoga with Adriene on YouTube.com
- Walk / run the stairs in or around your place
- Walk /run around the block or if you're lucky enough to have a park nearby

Active Spring Cleaning: as many of us seem to be motivated to disinfect everything right now, why not make it a productive cleansing of our physical space, to model a cleanse of our emotional space, as well! Our external environment reflects and impacts our internal environment and vice versa. Plus, it's a great way to keep your body active while inside.

Nourish your Body: whether we are healthy or under the weather, giving our body the nutrients, water, medication, and rest that it needs are frequently overlooked acts of self-love. Listen to what your body needs and respond to it. Ways we might do this include:

- Cooking healthy meals
- Drinking lots of water
- Managing the intake of substances like alcohol, marijuana, sugar, caffeine

Music and Dancing: put on the tunes and move your body! Be silly, graceful, energetic...whatever you're feeling inside, use the music and dance to express it externally. Find a song that tells your story; use your body to convey that story. If you have someone to dance with dance to make each other laugh, smile or simply connect with (pets are great for this, too).

The Mind



Given that our minds are always active and it is part of our instinctual survival system to focus on the negative, we need to be actively practicing the redirection of our thoughts away from a non-stop spiral of worry. Give some of these strategies a try!

Audio podcasts: giving your mind a conversation or story to follow audibly can help channel the mind's energy away from its own spiral and into a more productive direction, enjoying entertainment and learning at the same time! Here are some great ones to try:

- The Adult Chair
- 10% Happier
- Tara Brach
- Oprah's Master Class or Super Soul Conversations
- Where Do We Begin?
- Arm Chair Experts

Meditation: practicing the art of present moment observation of our thoughts, without judgment, is an incredible exercise towards a healthier relationship with our thoughts. Meditation allows us to not be ruled by our thoughts but to instead notice them with perspective and self-awareness. Try these apps for a variety of guided meditations:

- Calm
- Headspace
- Insight Timer
- 10% Happier
- The Mindfulness App

Audio books and traditional books: Reading is an incredible way to redirect the mind when it begins to obsess and spiral. Try both the audio and written delivery to see how each can help in different ways. If you're anything like me, you have at least a couple of books you've never finished on your bookshelves. Or for new options, check out these resources:

- Free Local library apps:

- Libby, Overdrive, Kindle (yes, they access libraries), Hoopla
- Audible
- Look for inspirational books, especially!

Artwork and Creativity: channeling your thoughts, fears, and worry into works of creativity can not only help you release the energy from your mind and body but can also provide a sense of creation and accomplishment. Using creative modalities to externalize the distress also provides a fun activity to do with family, kids, and partners. Try some of these activities:

- Coloring books for all ages
- Journaling
- Use old magazines lying around the house to create a vision board for what you want your life to look like going forward
- Cooking – challenge yourself to your own version of “Chopped” a la the Food Network
- Make homemade play dough using flour, salt, boiling water, and either Kool-Aid or food coloring. Add essential oils for an additional aromatherapy element (great for sensory regulation, too)!

Compassion for all parts of yourself: we all have different sides of our selves. From the part of us that manages responsibility and works hard at our jobs, to the part that can let loose with the best of them, it is common for the different aspects of ourselves to have differing responses during times of fear and stress, as well. Especially during anxiety-producing times, check in on the young / child part in you, who likely feels afraid and not sure if they are going to be okay. Compassionate inner dialogue, just like a loving parent to a child, can reassure this part of ourselves that may be genuinely scared right now.

The Soul



Spiritual or religious practice: if you identify with a spiritual belief system, engaging in this practice, especially during difficult times, can help you stay connected to something larger than the immediate events surrounding us, with a sense of love and connection. Here are some possible ways to practice connecting with your higher power, God, the universe or however you find connection with something larger than you.

- Prayer

- Meditation
- Gratitude
- Spiritual traditions and routines like reading sacred texts (Bible, Torah, Quran, etc.).
- Acts of forgiveness
- Acts of service and kindness
- Listening to meaningful music
- Giving your negative thoughts to your higher power
- Focusing on the power of nature

Connecting with others: even if we are serious introverts, the fact is we are social beings. It is in our evolutionary history and in our cells. Thus, when we don't have regular engagement in some way, we can feel dysregulated, lonely, and just generally unhealthy. Here are some ways to engage with others even if they aren't in your immediate environment.

- Video phone calls
- Marco Polo app allows for sending videos back and forth
- Take pictures of what you're doing and send to friends for picture conversations
- Look through existing photo albums
- Good old fashioned phone conversations
- Play games with others online
- Watch live streaming events such as the [Seattle Symphony Orchestra](#)
- Remind yourself that there are people in the world who truly care about you even if you aren't currently able to connect.

I hope that some of these ideas will spark your interest and invite you to be active in your efforts towards wellness over anxiety during this difficult time. Focus on what you do know, the choices you do have (even if they're not your favorites) and the ways that we can still connect with others. You certainly have your own individual go-to strategies so make sure you're listening to yourself and nurturing your own needs.

I will be practicing all of these above strategies myself so I can stay healthy and available to continue our work together.

I appreciate you and wish you wellness,
Dr. Kristy Eldredge, EdD, LPC, ACS, NCC