EAP Column

optima Global Health

COVID-19: strategies to better manage stress

Stress is your body's natural reaction to a situation that requires adaptation—and the COVID-19 pandemic certainly fits the bill! Stress helps give your body the energy it needs to react to danger, but too much stress can keep you from making smart decisions and reacting appropriately. Here are a few strategies for keeping a cool head during the crisis.

PREVENTING STRESS

Pay attention to the news, but don't obsess over it!

- Get your information from reliable sources, like the Government and World Health Organization websites.
- Avoid information overload! Set aside a specific time for checking the news, then go about your day as usual.

Keep busy

- Try to maintain your normal routine (wake up around the same time you normally would, get dressed, do a hobby, etc.).
- Plan out your day.
- Structure your schedule and set rules for your kids. Teleworking while your kids are at home can be a challenge, but it's important not to let chaos reign.

Practice self-compassion

- Give yourself permission to make mistakes. Now is not the time to be a perfectionist! Given what's going on, it's unreasonable to expect everyone to perform at 100%.

Focus on the positive

- Notice when you have negative thoughts like "I'm stuck here with nothing to do," "I'll never get anything done with the kids home," etc.
- Flip the script and look for the good in the situation instead—for instance, "I have more time to play with the kids," or "I have more time to try new hobbies at home."

MANAGING STRESS

Get moving!

- Physical activity is a great way to reduce stress and boost your mood.
- Go out for a walk, follow along with an exercise video… even shoveling out your car counts!
- Set healthy habits: eat well, get enough sleep and limit your alcohol consumption.

Communicate

- Don't be a hermit. Keep in touch with your loved ones over the phone and on social media.
- Let it all out! Talk to a friend, write, draw or even sing.

Practice stress management and breathing techniques

- Deep belly breaths
- Cardiac coherence
- Meditation and/or mindfulness
- Grounding

There are tons of applications and guided videos online to help you get started.

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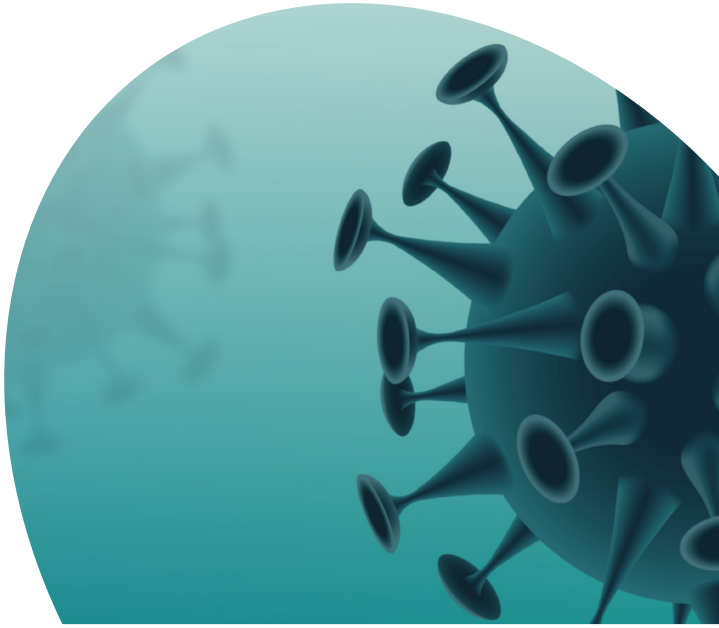

Optim'assist can be reached
7 days a week • 24 hours a day

514-352-2240 or toll free : 1-855-480-2240

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WHEN SHOULD YOU ASK FOR HELP?

Everyone will react differently to a given situation. Your personality, your personal history, and the things you have to manage in your daily life are just some of the factors that can influence how you experience a situation. Finding it harder to manage your stress and emotions than someone else doesn't mean you're weak. Sometimes, you need to stop letting your fear and pride stand in the way and ask for help.

When stress symptoms start impacting your daily life, not only is it smart to seek help from counsellors—it's *essential*. Your employee assistance program is a good place to start.

Watch for signs like:

- Feeling suffocated or a sense of panic
- Extreme fatigue
- Frequently crying for no reason
- Having trouble doing your everyday activities or losing interest in things you normally enjoy
- Intrusive negative thoughts
- Increased consumption of alcohol, medication or other drugs
- Any other major emotional, mental or behavioural changes

But you don't have to wait until things are dire to reach out. Seek help the moment you notice something isn't right. Remember, our counsellors are here to help.

RESOURCES

Government of Canada

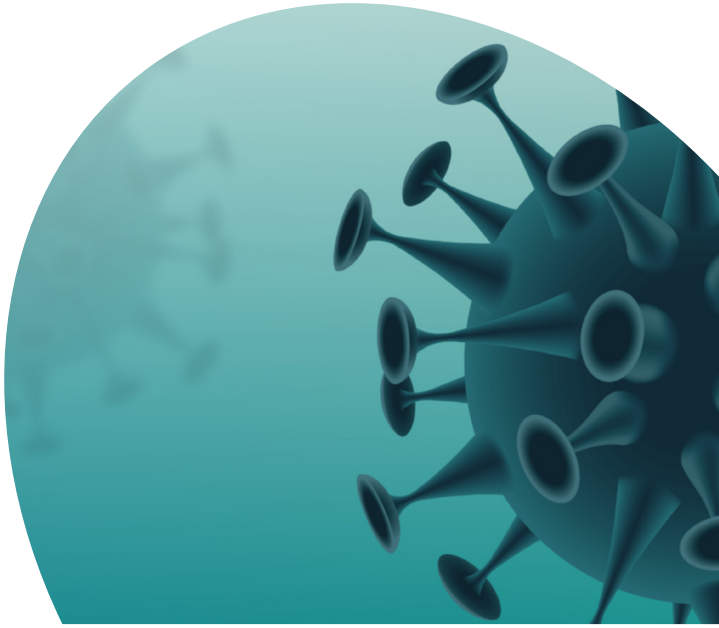
- www.canada.ca/coronavirus
- COVID-19 information hotline: 1-833-784-4397

World Health Organization

- https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

Provincial Public Health Authorities

- British Columbia: 811 or www.bccdc.ca/covid19
- Alberta: 811 or www.myhealth.alberta.ca
- Saskatchewan: 811 or www.saskhealthauthority.ca
- Manitoba: 1-888-315-9257 or www.manitoba.ca/covid19
- Ontario: 1-866-797-0000 or www.publichealthontario.ca
- Quebec: 1-877-644-4545 or www.quebec.ca/en/coronavirus
- New Brunswick: 811 or www.gnb.ca/publichealth
- Nova Scotia: 811 or www.nshealth.ca/public-health
- Prince Edward Island: 811 or www.princeedwardisland.ca/covid19
- Newfoundland and Labrador: 811, 1-888-709-2929 or www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19
- Nunavut: 867-975-5772 or www.gov.nu.ca/health
- Northwest Territories: 911 or www.hss.gov.nt.ca
- Yukon Territory: 811 or www.yukon.ca/covid-19



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