

Fifteen Strategies to Support Your Mental Health During This Time

Heather Klein, PhD, LP

We all have mental health needs, just like we have physical health needs. Given current circumstances anxiety and depression are heightened due to activation of our built-in flight/fight/freeze responses. During this time support your mental health daily by:

1. Making your bed when you wake up- seriously 1 minute provides a sense of accomplishment, tidiness, and you'll be less likely to crawl back in bed.
2. Open the shades and curtains- let the light in.
3. Take a shower. You can actually take time right now to enjoy one...
4. Get outside everyday. Breathe the air, engage your senses. What do you see, hear, taste, touch, and feel. Notice beauty in the moment.
5. Set limits on how much news & social media you take in.
6. Focus on healthy habits - that mind-body connection thing is a real thing. Try to keep stable bedtimes (go to bed and get up at similar times), eat lean proteins/veggies/fruits, drink water, and move your body. Do these things for your mental health- the physical benefits are a given.
7. Practice breathing. When your brain is in flight/fight/freeze mode, focusing on your breathing will help cool the alarm system, recenter you, and help bring you back to a rest/digest mode. See attachment for breathing exercises. I recommend the 4-7-8 method. YouTube Dr.Weil and watch the video of him in a purple shirt.
8. Laugh — humor is still accessible during hard times. Engage in it, enjoy yourself!
9. Practice gratitude. There is always someone/something to appreciate. Gratitude is one way to disengage from a negative mindset. Science has shown that a gratitude practice before bed can help you sleep better.

10. Practice grit. We are capable of doing hard things. Remind yourself of this often. We can become more comfortable with being uncomfortable.

11. Create predictability in your day by establishing a general routine.

12. Do something meaningful. Pray, connect with loved ones, meditate, write, read, do something creative, sit quietly, get active, engage in a spiritual/religious practice...anything that feeds your heart, mind, body, spirit.

13. If you work from home and/or have kids distance learning, set up a work station for each person complete with the tools needed. Let each person add a few things to personalize the space without making it distracting. Utilize a routine that includes work time, movement breaks, and food (meals & snacks). If possible get outside to move and/or eat.

14. Be a source of light and hope. Even though we are practicing social distancing we can still offer encouragement and love.

15. Talk to a professional. Telehealth appointments are now accessible and covered by insurance.