Managing Stress during Covid-19

All of us are feeling some level of stress as the nation continues to transition, grieve, and search for a new normal that feels safe. EMDRIA (an organisation that delivers a treatment for trauma called EMDR) have put together a few trauma-informed reminders for self-care as you face your daily stressors.

**1. Get up and stretch.** Yes, even if you think you will look a fool! Side bends, lunges, neck rolls, arms over your head. Whatever it takes to make you feel your connection to your body and take your brain out of a mental spin. The title of Bessel van der Kolk’s famous book, *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), says it all. Our bodies are part of how we interact with the world. Our bodies feel and store anxiety and stress. Moving and feeling your body can help move anxiety through you and remind you that you are safe in your body in the present moment.

**2. Take five slow intentional deep breaths**. Make these breaths the kind where you feel your whole lower ribcage expanding on the inhale, and you picture your stress exiting with your exhale.

 **3. Disconnect from the news media.** It is essential to know what is happening and what is happening can be riveting. But make your time catching up on the news a conscious choice. Reporting is one thing, but the current digital news media has figured out how to keep us hooked by shocking us again and again with rehashed stories to keep us paying attention. Trauma therapists will tell you that each ‘hit’ can trigger the body’s stress response. Trust when your gut tells you ‘I’ve got the gist’ and turn it off until later.

 **4. Connect with a loved one.** Talk to a friend or family member. Allow your brain’s dopamine response system to be triggered by relational connection rather than digital feedback (or carb-loading or that last glass of wine…). Better yet, [**hug**](https://www.wellandgood.com/benefits-of-hugging-stress-relief/) a family member–pets included! In their book *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* (2019), the Nagoski sisters mention that a 20-second hug can release oxytocin and help ease your stress response.

**5. Take a walk.**Walking provides a perspective shift and an opportunity to reset the mind. And how cool is it to think about [**walking**](https://www.thesmartset.com/walking-myself-home/) as a natural way to relieve stress via alternating bilateral stimulation? (Alternating bilateral stimulation is one part of [**EMDR therapy,**](https://www.emdria.org/about-emdr-therapy/) a trauma therapy.) If possible, find a park or natural area to walk to so you can also be reminded that we are just one part of the larger natural world. For those people who cannot walk, take a few minutes outside just being.



**6. Drink a glass of water.**Staying hydrated can reduce stress. It can provide an interruption from the stressful thing, but more than that, [**drinking water**](https://www.webmd.com/diet/features/water-stress-reduction#1) helps stabilize cortisol (a stress hormone) levels and supports your brain.

**7. Turn off all screens for five minutes.**It sounds so easy, but we all know how hard it is. Even if we manage to rip ourselves away from the news cycle, [**social media**](https://au.reachout.com/articles/4-signs-social-media-is-sending-you-into-a-spin) platforms are designed to be our next go-to, to keep our attention glued for that next dopamine hit. Shutting off all screens and putting your phone in airplane mode for five minutes (or a whole evening) can feel liberating. A total digital break can help you reset, rest your eyes, make you feel more present and focused for those around you, and remind you what stillness is like.

**8. Give yourself a massage.**Maybe your shoulders are tight, or your head or hands need some attention. Like stretching, this can shift your focus away from mental anxiety and ease tension where you hold that stress in your body. The bonus is that massaging yourself is also showing yourself compassion, a meaningful way to acknowledge the pressure of the moment and allow yourself to feel it while caring for yourself. As Kristin Neff says on her [**website**](https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/) “having compassion for yourself means that you honour and accept your humanness.”

**9. Journal.** Set aside a few minutes a day to reflect on your feelings and reactions to what is going on in the world by [**writing them down**](https://www.verywellmind.com/journaling-a-great-tool-for-coping-with-anxiety-3144672). Getting those experiences and emotions outside of you on the page helps integrate your brain’s thinking and feeling parts. If this feels daunting, start with a gratitude list. What are three things you are grateful for each day?

**10. Hum to yourself.**Or laugh out loud or sing your favourite song. Who cares if someone thinks you are crazy? Trust that you are self-soothing by activating your vocal cords, which activate your [**vagus nerve**](https://www.allied-services.org/news/2020/june/the-vagus-nerve-your-secret-weapon-in-fighting-s/)decreasing stress. You are creating a resonance within yourself.

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