



Mental Health Now and Beyond the Pandemic

Strategies to survive the mental stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic

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An unprecedented year, COVID-19 has presented us the ironies of life.

As social beings, we need to be with others, we need to have that sense of belonging, and yet the best way to help and protect others is to have social distancing for collective well-being. *We learned how to live with this.*

As life presents challenges of scarcity, not having opportunities to meet others, to access places we want to visit, to do the things we used to do, we are presented with opportunities to focus on the essentials and blessing of life. It is for us to have that perspective in looking at what's good in the life that we have today. *We learned to appreciate.*

As life presents so much uncertainty, we are challenged to re-focus on how we can make things more certain by zeroing on things where we have control over, where we can have influence, where we can take action. *We learned to accept and navigate the reality.*

We have seen how COVID-19 has presented us the great opportunity to be more human, to reset and truly focus on the essentials in life. This crisis has made us feel a lot of difficult, intense emotions, feelings and made us experience

unusual stresses in life. We all had to make adjustments, we all had to figure out how to cope and we all had to figure out how to live with the pandemic. During this period, more and more people are needing help on how to function better amidst crisis, how to tackle our mental health issues and how to be resilient given the uncertainty.

Research showed that the next pandemic is Mental Health. And what should we be doing about it?

This article presents practical tips and tools as we strive to strengthen our mental health during this extra challenging period.

Train the Mind to be Calm

One of the hardest things to do these days is to be still and be quiet so we can pay attention to what's going on inside us. It is important to note also that the busier you are the more quiet time you need. When we can choose to mindfully pause even for just 10 minutes daily, we are training our brain to respond and not just react to stressful situations. We are also training our brain to self-validate and acknowledge our emotions. It is important to remember that every emotion is valid, every emotion is a data. When we avoid emotions, they will continue

to dominate or overpower us. What we resist, persists. Training the mind to be calm makes us listen to ourselves.

Make Physical Health a Priority

There is no mental health without physical health. Both are equally important. Let's not forget the basics or essentials on making physical health a priority.

Be Active: make sure to spend at least 10-15 a day of movement or exercise. Spending some time also under the sun contributes to a good night sleep.

Sleep: we all need a sufficient amount of sleep, period. It is essential to feel recharged after sleeping. Here are some practical tips to feel recharged:

- Unplug 30-40 mins prior to sleeping
- Sleep only when you feel sleepy
- Make your bed a place for sleeping, not for working

Eat Healthy: food affects our mood. Keeping a regular plant-based diet is highly recommended for better immunity.

Cultivate Meaningful Relationships

Research showed that the quality of your relationship is a predictor of your well-being. During this period of pandemic how are you cultivating meaningful relationships? It is important to find or create intentional activities for you to nourish your relationships especially with the most important people in your life.

Choose Gratitude and Hope

Gratitude is an antidote to stress. For one's well-being, it is highly recommended to cultivate a grateful heart, a grateful attitude. I honestly believe that our blessings outweigh all the problems that we have. I encourage you to come up with your own gratitude activity, to just be reminded of all your blessings. Gratitude activities can include a Gratitude Pause each day for a few minutes to recall your blessings or what you are grateful for per day, Gratitude

Journal- writing your thoughts about your daily blessings. Writing allows us to centre to what is important to us. It will also be more worthwhile if your insights or reflections are shared with others.

We can all choose to thrive despite the adversity. We just need to make deliberate and intentional choices to take care of our mind, heart and body.

There is no better time to take care of our health. It's a choice each one can make. ■

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