

Taking Care of Yourself

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Parents in general but especially parents of those with chronic illness are notoriously known for putting themselves last when it comes to caring for themselves

Unprecedented time of anxiety and great uncertainty

- Unexpected frustrations with new work challenges or even more so--no work!
- Isolation from family and friends
- Significant disruptions in our routine
- Feeling conflicted from the pull of demands from work and family responsibilities
- Difficulty focusing and concentrating

- Great concern about your health and your family's health
- Guilt for taking any time for yourself

Normal to experience stress amid the challenges

- Stress can show up in a variety of ways, including:
 - **Physical reactions:** rapid heart rate, muscle tension, headaches, GI distress, nausea, insomnia, fatigue, changes in appetite
 - **Emotional reactions:** fear or terror, anger, irritability, argumentativeness, hopelessness, depression, anxiety, numbness, detachment, despair, difficulty maintaining emotional balance

STRESS

--**Cognitive reactions:** difficulty with problem-solving or decision-making, imagining only the worst-case scenarios, flashbacks/nightmares

--**Behavioral reactions:** hostility, blaming, unnecessary risk-taking, reduced ability to cooperate, conflicts with peers or family, withdrawal

How can we take better care of ourselves

- Show compassion for yourself and others. Be kind and recognize we are all navigating uncharted territory
- Stay calm. Easier said than done, but try to take one moment at a time. Practice being a non-anxious presence
- Breathe. Slow deep breathing is physically incompatible with an anxiety response. It is a powerful way to calm your body and mind when you feel especially stressed, anxious or overwhelmed

- Maintain good health habits. As stress increase, health habits are often first to go. Eat nutritious foods, limit alcohol, avoid tobacco and caffeine.
- Sleep is essential, give it priority
- Exercise—set aside time for walking, biking running, hiking, playing ball with a family member, or do online exercises, yogo, tai chi
- Play games, do art, write letters, keep a journal

An astronaut's advice from someone who has to live in isolation for periods of time

- Have a routine, If everybody just kind of lounges around and doesn't get up until 11 and nobody's brushing their hair or their teeth, not only do you look crappy and feel crappy, but you just get in that funk. So sticking to a Monday through Friday routine is probably the most basic thing that I would recommend.

- Be in nature. Being outside is a powerful way to disconnect.
- Stay connected. While practicing “physical distance”, you don’t have to practice “social distancing”. We need one another. Reach out to family and friends--Telephone, FaceTime, Zoom, Skype or Google Hangouts to decrease your sense of isolation. Meaningful connections and emotional support are critical to our health and well-being.

- Clean and Organize—When the world is out of control, control what you can. This can be very therapeutic
- Focus on gratitude and appreciation. Amid all the chaos, remind yourself what is going well and what you are grateful for. Appreciation boosts our ability to keep going in difficult times
- Turn off news or negative social media. Limit to once a day, twice maximum

- Take this opportunity to learn something with the family
- Focus on what lifts your spirits. This will be different for each person—movies, a bubble bath, what ever gives you an uplift. This helps you not run on empty.

Surprise someone with an act of kindness—drop off a pot of flowers/cookies at a neighbor's door

- It is important to give ourselves the opportunity to acknowledge and process our emotions. Doing so can actually produce more growth than you thought possible. It is a time to figure out what we truly value—as a person, a family, and as a nation

- From my experience with TSC families, I actually think you are better equipped than most in dealing with our world at this time. You know about adversity, anyone with seizures or a child with seizures lives with the unpredictable every day of their life. You handle the worst of emergencies and yet, you persevere and you grow. You have a lot to teach the rest of us.

Sign on a sheet overhanging interstate
40 in Raleigh, NC

The darkest of nights
always come
to an end

Online coping resources

- <https://www.mentalhealthapps.org/>.
- <https://www.virusanxiety.com/> is a website with useful information and a toolkit for dealing with anxiety and related issues in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOURCES

- **Stress/anxiety related to COVID-19:**
- Seven crucial research findings that can help people deal with COVID-19: <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-research-findings>
- Five ways to view coverage of the coronavirus: <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics>
- Coronavirus anxiety: <https://www.apa.org/research/action/speaking-of-psychology/coronavirus-anxiety>

Resources

- <https://stream.osumc.edu/IntVideos/mim/Clarity10.mp3>
Other Stress Reduction Resources for this Challenging Crisis:
- Some fast reads to help both yourself and your friends and Family that are asking you for advice:
- Anxiety is Contagious (Judson Brewer is an excellent researcher) Mindfulness may help navigate the Coronavirus Panic and help you stop touching your face
- 10 Effective Methods to Soothe an Anxious Brain”. Mindful. 10/22/19./19. “Practicing Self-Compassion Can Boost Your Mental Health”. Mindful. 9/26/19.
- “Anxious? Three Ways to Get Out of Panic Mode”. Mindful. 3/14/19.

