

Self-Care: How to Protect Your Mental Health During Uncertain Times

The outbreak of Covid-19 has created change for all us: we may be working at a distance, not able to see our families, friends and colleagues in person, and may even be isolated in our homes. This can be very stressful and bring up feelings of grief, anger, despair, and loneliness. It is important for you to be able to recognize when your mental wellness is being negatively impacted.

Recognizing Signs of Stress

Your Behaviour:

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana use, or use of illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently or worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Your Body:

- Having stomach aches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled

Your Emotions:

- Being anxious or fearful
- Feeling depressed or overwhelmed by sadness
- Feeling angry or guilty
- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Not caring about anything
- Feeling responsible for everyone else's wellness

Your Thinking:

- Having trouble remembering things
- Feeling confused

- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Having difficulty making decisions

Coping with Stress

- Limit the amount of time you spend reading or watching things which aren't making you feel better. Perhaps decide on a specific time to check in with the news.
- Avoid misinformation - stay informed by sticking to trusted sources of information, like the [Government of Canada](#) and the [Government of Manitoba](#) websites.
- Have breaks from social media and mute things which are triggering. Mute key words which might be triggering on Twitter and unfollow or mute accounts. Mute WhatsApp groups and hide Facebook posts and feeds if you find them too overwhelming.
- Wash your hands - but not excessively. To eliminate all traces of the virus on your hands, a quick scrub and a rinse won't cut it. Refer to the [Government of Manitoba poster](#) on effective hand-washing.
- Stay connected with people. Make sure you have updated contact info for the people you care about: phone numbers, emails, and social media accounts. Agree to regular check-in times so you can feel connected.
- Keep Yourself Healthy. Eat healthy foods, drink water, and avoid excessive amounts of caffeine, alcohol, and marijuana. Don't use tobacco or illegal drugs. Get enough sleep and plenty of physical exercise.
- Avoid burnout. Now more than ever, it's important to have down time. Access sunlight and nature whenever possible. Engage in hobbies. Read for pleasure. Take a bath. Listen to music. Create. Talk about your feelings with loved ones and friends often. Remember to laugh. Now is the time to explore new methods in your efforts to cope - try yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises.

Practicing self-care isn't always easy. It's a practice that requires you choosing to do it. You must intentionally make space for it and implement self-care strategies into your regular routine. Fortunately, there are many ways you can practice self-care, even when social distancing.

Homewood Health is a great resource for you and your family members: www.homeweb.ca or 1-800-663-1142.

Adapted from the South College School of Pharmacy's Center for Student Learning newsletter: https://sway.office.com/DI3EfuY4n5tZII7n?fbclid=IwAR2ATxxOboxaU1wqNnI2613rqxx6apceUwNRrp3mMV5oS_phJGr6uaOwE1k and "Manage Anxiety & Stress" by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>