

## **Managing Stress During the Pandemic**

**By Gabe Avila**

With the emergence of COVID-19, many things changed. For some, there are economic repercussions, with work hours cut or jobs lost completely. Some must now work from home. Others risk infection to work in essential jobs. With schools closed, many now have children home full time. Some must do both work and homeschooling at the same time. I can say for myself, homeschooling is quite an adventure! And these are only some of the changes, along with masks, disinfecting, loneliness, and boredom. These changes taken all together are a recipe for anxiety and stress. But how do we deal with that stress?

### **Be active**

It's difficult to be active when we're supposed to be sheltering at home, but exercise, even going on a ten minute walk, is statistically shown to have a positive effect on your mood. Exercise and other physical activity releases endorphins, a hormone that blocks pain and acts as a sedative. Studies show regular exercise improves mood and helps with sleep. Additionally, sunlight from being outside provides much needed Vitamin D. If you can't get outside, you can also do exercises in the home. There are many short exercise videos on YouTube if you need some inspiration.

### **Spiritual Practices**

Many people find prayer, meditation, and other spiritual practices relaxing. In a new world of physical distancing, we now have new virtual options to practice spirituality; St. Martin's currently offers virtual Sunday services as well as weekday Morning Prayer and Compline services. See the website for more details ([www.churchofstmartin.org](http://www.churchofstmartin.org) ). If attending these virtual services is not something you find helpful, there are many other spiritual practices.

If you don't have a spiritual practice you do regularly, perhaps try a few out. These look different for everyone and what might help someone else might not help you, so don't be discouraged if something you try doesn't fit for you. Reading scripture, offering a daily prayer, the use of prayer beads, meditating are just a few. There are many guided meditations available online. Some people have found creating an altar at home to be particularly useful.

### **Support Network**

A support network of friends, family, and community groups such as churches and common interest groups can help you immensely. Reach out to them. Being alone during a stressful event such as this can be very challenging. Your support network is there to support you, even if it just means talking about something else for a little bit.

A bit of social interaction can help alleviate feelings of stress or loneliness, or just help break up the monotony of the day. There's always a phone call! There are many video conferencing apps and websites available to help make it easier to be social. Boardgamearena.com is a great place to play board games with others. Meetup.com has a wide variety of common interest groups and most are meeting virtually right now. Netflix

Party allows you to watch movies together. One other idea: get involved in a social service to help others—it will also help your loneliness!

### **Routine**

Try to keep a routine. Disruption to your eating and sleeping patterns will increase your stress.

### **Techniques**

There are a lot of techniques that help with stress, such as mindfulness (the practice of staying present) and deep breathing. One way to practice mindfulness is to pause and name five things you can hear, see, touch, taste, or smell at that particular moment. Mindfulness helps keep you focused on the present and not the stressors surrounding you. Deep breathing is similar, but focuses on breathing only.

**Just remember**, feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety, or fear are all completely normal responses to an abnormal event. It's okay to feel overwhelmed. Take little steps if you are. Contact a professional if you need to. With time, I hope that we find a new normal. The above items are just some of the ways to help manage stress. What other techniques can you think of?

May, 2020