

COVID-19



MAINTAINING COMPOSURE DURING COVID-19

While government leaders and health officials around the world are encouraging people to remain calm, many are finding it difficult to do so given the strong measures being taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Schools in the United States are cancelling classes, Italy has closed all stores except grocery stores and pharmacies, and citizens in Spain have been told to stay home for at least 15 days. To make matters worse, this unprecedented global response is being played out live on television and social media.

The body's natural response to potential harm is to release large quantities of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine to aid in alertness, muscle preparedness, and energy. Therefore, it's not unusual to feel heightened anxiety and a sense of uncertainty given the scale of the outbreak and media coverage.

While it's natural to feel anxious in times of uncertainty, operating in "fight or flight" mode for an extended period of time can result in high blood pressure, difficulty sleeping, digestion issues, and poor decision-making. Therefore, it's important that individuals actively manage their stress levels in order to protect both their physical and emotional health. Not only will this help facilitate rational thinking, but it can also help optimize the body's immune system.

Below are several ways to manage emotional health during uncertainty:

- Consider the impact of the current newsfeed and limit exposure if needed.
- Get regular news updates from trusted official sources for news. Turn off instant notifications.
- Keep to a consistent routine.
- Participate in exercise and/or stretching.
- Practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, yoga, and/or mindfulness.
- Recognize when you are catastrophizing (jumping to unreasonable conclusions) and redirect your thoughts to what you know to be true.
- Ground your thoughts into the present by focusing on what you can see, hear, smell, and tactically feel.

Some people turn to drugs, smoking, and alcohol to manage their stress. However, these are all unhealthy methods that can diminish the body's immune system.

Ways to support physical health:

- Getting eight to nine hours of uninterrupted sleep at night
- Drinking at least two liters of water a day
- Increasing intake of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein
- Minimizing foods high in fat and sugar

Individuals who feel like they need professional health managing their anxiety should consistently be accessing their employee wellbeing resources, if available and/or contact their physician.