

## Psychological first aid

### Resiliency in times of stress

Though it may not seem like it at times, stress is one of the normal, healthy human responses — both physical and emotional — to life events. In today's world, an all-too-familiar source of stress is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the reasons for this increased stress are:

- *Uncertainty* — This includes worry about what might happen if you or a loved one contracts the virus. There's particular worry for older adults and those with chronic medical issues who have heightened vulnerability to a life-threatening infection. In addition, there may be uncertainty about financial health due to a job loss for yourself or loved ones, or loss of savings and investments in the volatile economy. Uncertainty may crop up elsewhere, such as concerns about safely getting groceries or filling a prescription, or visiting your health care provider for health concerns.
- *Information overload* — You may be surrounded by information and discussion about COVID-19 most of the day, whether from TV, radio, newspapers, social media, internet sites, friends, neighbors and co-workers.
- *Changes to your daily routines* — Frustration with loneliness and isolation can occur if you are primarily confined to your home and unable to do activities you would normally enjoy or see friends and loved ones. Or you may find yourself tired of living in close quarters with family members with whom you don't normally spend so much time.

In addition to COVID-19-related stress, there's also the recent social upheaval related to race, or being stressed by the way you or others are treated due to race or ethnicity. A contentious election season is also approaching. Life is full of other sources of stress, as well, such as grieving for the loss of a loved one, downsizing and moving to a new dwelling, an ongoing health problem, or difficulties in relationships. And don't forget positive sources of stress, which are stressful nonetheless. These include situations such as planning for a wedding or your next big vacation.

Stress is a normal part of life. As a beneficial influence, stress can lead to growth and change. It can be motivating, helping you to be more aware of your surroundings, spurring you to take action or to plan and prepare for the future.

However, stress can affect your body and mind in negative ways, which can become increasingly problematic if it persists over time. You may show signs and symptoms related to your:

- *Emotions* — Such as anxiety, fear, grief and sadness.
- *Body function* — These include sleep problems, muscle tension, upset stomach, headache, and fatigue.
- *Thoughts* — These include a racing mind, worry and persistent negative thinking (rumination).
- *Behaviors* — These include avoidance, social withdrawal, seeking reassurance, drug or alcohol misuse, overeating or undereating, and reduced exercise.



### Sleep tips

Although you might not be able to control all of the factors that interfere with your sleep, you can adopt habits that encourage better sleep. Here are some tips:

- *Set a good foundation*—Physical activity increases the amount of energy you expend, releases your “feel-good” hormones (endorphins) and helps regulate body temperature, all of which contribute to better sleep. Avoid heavy food or alcohol before bed, both of which can hinder sleep. If you’re sensitive to caffeine, avoid that too.

- *Boost your circadian rhythm*—Getting plenty of sunlight during the day can help synchronize your biological clock with the course of the day and get you ready for nighttime. Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day also reinforces your body’s sleep-wake cycle and helps promote sleep.

- *Shed your worries*—If you tend to worry, jot down your concerns, including possible solutions, then set them aside for tomorrow. Practice a relaxing ritual each night, such as reading, listening to soothing music, stretching or thinking of things to be grateful for.

- *Make your bedroom a sleep sanctuary*—Keep out activities such as eating, watching TV, browsing the internet, answering emails or talking on the phone.

- *Keep it cool, dark and quiet*—Consider using room-darkening shades, earplugs, a fan or other devices. Choose comfortable bedding and try to make sure you have room to stretch out.

Everyone reacts differently to difficult situations, and it’s normal to feel stress and worry during a crisis. But facing multiple challenges daily, such as COVID-19 effects and racially-related social strain can push some beyond their ability to cope. Many people may have mental health concerns, such as symptoms of anxiety and depression, during this time. If you were already dealing with mental health issues before the pandemic, your symptoms may have changed or worsened.

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling helpless, sad, angry, irritable, hopeless, anxious or afraid. You may have trouble concentrating on typical tasks. For example, you may find that you need to reread something multiple times to understand it, or you may not be able to concentrate to read at all. You may also develop changes in appetite, body aches and pains, or changes in sleep, or you may feel unable to face routine chores.

When these signs and symptoms last for several days in a row, make you miserable and interfere with your daily life such that you find it hard to carry out normal responsibilities, it’s time to ask for help. Reach out to a friend, family member, spiritual leader, primary care provider, mental health professional, resources provided by your health insurer or an organization such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

In addition, use the information in this Special Report to help manage stress and build resiliency on your own or in conjunction with seeking help from others or a medical professional.

### Resiliency is normal, too

Resiliency is defined as the power or ability to return to the original form or position after being bent, compressed or stretched. When it comes to humans, resiliency is the ability to withstand and bounce back from adversity.

Difficult and potentially devastating situations happen to everyone. When adversity strikes, it’s normal to experience anger, grief, pain, loss of control and other strong emotions. But when you’re resilient, you’re able to recover to a state where you’re able to keep functioning physically and mentally. Your problems may not go away, but it doesn’t take long before you’re able to adjust to them and find constructive ways to focus your energies, adapt and move forward.

In contrast, a lack of resiliency may mean that you dwell on problems and limitations, feel victimized or hopeless, withdraw from others, and perhaps turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms. As such, low resiliency increases the risk of anxiety, depression, harmful stress, substance misuse and interpersonal problems.

If you’re an older adult, chances are you’ve had a setback or two in your life — and found a way to bounce back. In fact, resiliency is a common, fundamental feature of everyday coping. It’s not simply based on being strong or stoic or having exceptional emotional strength.

Your personal resiliency may vary over time. In addition, there are individual differences in resiliency. No matter where your resiliency level lies, you can take steps to strengthen it. Many factors contribute to being resilient, and these can often be learned and developed.

Whether you feel stress from COVID-19 or from other areas of life, training yourself in resiliency can help you reduce the burden of stress and anxiety. It also helps you learn to cope better by:

- Correcting the imbalance between the demands you feel and your available resources to cope with those demands
- Focusing on controlling the controllable, while letting go of the uncontrollable
- Seeing challenges as opportunities rather than overwhelming obstacles

The following pages highlight key areas to build resiliency and manage stress. Enhancing your physical, mental and emotional resiliency isn't like flipping a light switch. It can take time and effort, and results may not be immediately obvious. Still, it's worth working toward — not only because you may improve resiliency to setbacks, stressful events or a crisis but also because these tips and practices are part of leading a healthy, productive, calmer, happier and more enjoyable life.

## Maintain healthy habits

When life feels overwhelming, you may start to feel distracted in your thinking and activities. It's normal to make excuses to avoid things that, in normal times, bring you a sense of order or joy. Particularly in times of stress and anxiety, it's important to make or maintain healthy habits and routines, as a bit of structure is a fairly reliable way to help boost mood and energy. Routines can help center you and improve your sense of control over your life. Some things to focus on include:

- *Making sleep a priority* — Try to get up at about the same time every day. Go to bed at about the same time every day. Make sure that you are getting enough restful sleep. Although eight hours a night is a common goal, the right amount of sleep varies. The most important factor is whether you routinely feel rested during the day. Do you tend to feel drowsy? Does your ability to concentrate decline in low-stimulus situations, such as longer drives, reading, watching TV, talking on the phone or completing desk work? If this sounds like you, you're likely not getting enough sleep. (See "Sleep tips," page 2.)

- *Getting out and moving* — Exercise increases the amount of energy you expend during the day plus releases "feel-good" hormones (endorphins) produced by your body. Other evidence suggests that daily exercise leads to improved emotional well-being, a lower body mass index (BMI) and increased physical functioning. Helpful activities range from aerobic exercises — such as walking, endurance training and tai chi — to strength training exercises. In general, aim to exercise most days for about 30 to 60 minutes.

- *Eating well* — Nourish your body with foods that support your health. Examples include fruits, vegetables, healthy fats and whole grains. Other healthy foods are fish, lean meats, beans and legumes. These foods give you long-lasting energy, and maintaining nutrient intake reduces your risk for a mood disorder.

- *Waking up your brain* — Start each day with a routine, even if you know you won't be leaving the house. Take a shower or bath. Get dressed. Stay engaged with activities that are meaningful to you. Keep up with your daily chores. Take your medications.

## Stay connected

In normal times, you probably make a point of seeing friends regularly and getting out, which creates opportunities for informal interactions with others, such as at a restaurant or at worship services. It's important to your mental and emotional well-being to continue interacting with others who reliably make you feel better. People are biologically designed to be nourished by connections. Just as hunger and thirst are protective feelings, the feeling of loneliness is a similar signal that alerts you to a need for companionship.

One way to counteract loneliness is through social connections. That's why it's a good idea to reach out to friends and family through phone calls or virtual methods such as texting, emails and video chats. However, you may still be lonely, and some older adults may have hearing or vision impairments that make virtual communication difficult.

## Helpful resources

Mental health apps can be cost-effective, portable ways to learn and strengthen coping skills. Apps are not meant to serve as a substitute for therapy. Listed below are a number of free mental health apps that may be helpful. Look for apps that have a recently updated version history.

- COVID Coach
- Breathe2Relax
- Happify
- Mindfulness Coach
- SuperBetter
- Calm
- Insight Timer

## Try to disconnect

Being informed about current events helps you keep yourself connected to the world. However, there's a risk in spending too much of your time consuming information. Today's media world is much different from that of previous generations. There's a constant stream of news and opinions available online, and it sometimes can be overwhelming.

To protect your mental health, set limits on the time you spend each day on social media and the news. Avoid looking for numerous news sources during the day. Rather than randomly surfing from one channel or website to the next, rely on one or two trusted sources. Finally, think about disconnecting from the news for periods of time during the day or having a "news fast." Try this: Schedule 15 to 30 minutes, two times a day, to get news. That's likely enough time to keep yourself informed but not overwhelmed. It's perfectly OK to not be constantly connected to electronics and information or news sources. (See "Decreasing your dose of daily news," page 5.)

## High anxiety

Feeling anxious is a normal, healthy human response to stressful circumstances. But sometimes fear and worry become excessive, overwhelming your thoughts, causing intense physical reactions and disrupting your quality of life. Anxiety disorders are sometimes mistakenly dismissed as part of aging or are overshadowed by other health issues.

Although there are different types of anxiety disorders, common signs of an anxiety disorder include:

- *Fearful thoughts* — Worry over potential threats or catastrophe, or inability to cope
- *Physical sensations* — A pounding heart, sweating, stomach distress, and feeling flushed, lightheaded, agitated or jumpy
- *Behaviors* — Avoiding going out because you're afraid of crowds or repeating certain activities, such as checking and rechecking the locks on your door
- *Negative coping strategies* — Distracting yourself with actions such as sleeping a lot, watching excess TV or drinking alcohol

If your worries and fears are upsetting you and you think you may have an anxiety disorder, don't dismiss it — talk to your health care provider. After an assessment of your signs and symptoms — often by a psychologist or psychiatrist — treatment usually centers on practical ways to overcome your fears. This is often done through cognitive behavioral therapy. With repeated practice, you learn to create new habits of thinking and behaving that help you bring your worries and fears under control. In some cases, medications may be recommended to help ease anxiety, especially soon after a diagnosis.

But there is good news. Being alone and feeling lonely don't have to be linked. You can find ways to combat feelings of loneliness and enrich your life even in isolation. Try to:

- *Stay psychologically close* — If you can't be physically close to those you love, hold them close in your mind. Think about people who make you happy and people you are grateful for. Think about those who inspire you. Surround yourself with their pictures; recall stories that involve them.
- *Be productive* — Use alone time to your advantage, and see it as an opportunity to invest in yourself. You may find the space for greater concentration, creativity and productivity. Expressing yourself — such as by drawing, painting, writing, sculpting, sewing, dancing, singing, taking photos, playing an instrument or writing music — may enhance your enjoyment of life and give it meaning. You could find a project that reminds you of past experiences or the people you love. Maybe it's time to finally organize your family photos or write down the important experiences of your life.
- *Consider a pet* — Whether furry, feathered or amphibian, a pet can provide many of the same companion benefits as human friendships. Various studies have shown that living with and caring for a cherished animal may help you cope with stress, reduce loneliness if you live alone and improve your mood.
- *Prioritize your partner* — Don't take your spouse or partner for granted. Take time to be there for each other. Brainstorm new activities or games you can learn together.

## Manage your thoughts

You may have found yourself worrying more often lately, thinking things such as "I know that if I catch the coronavirus, I will end up in the hospital," or "I'm scared that I will be laid off and won't be able to find a new job." Worry is common during times of stress, but you can keep it from running rampant. Worry can change how you think in several ways. As in the above examples, worry may cause you to:

- Think the worst (catastrophize)
- Overestimate the likelihood that bad things will happen to you
- Underestimate your ability to cope when bad things happen

That's why it's good to challenge — or at least intentionally consider — thoughts that cause worry, instead of just accepting them as facts. When you become aware of these thoughts, you can try to reframe them or think about them in different ways. This process can help keep them from escalating or becoming bigger. It can also help improve your mood and change what you do in response to worry. Try to keep this in mind:

- The most catastrophic outcomes tend to be the least likely to happen.
- The least catastrophic outcomes tend to be the most likely to happen.
- Worrying about the most catastrophic outcome does not generally change whether it will occur.

If you worry a lot, try this exercise. To start, write down one to five worries. Next, directly challenge those thoughts. Write out answers to these questions:

- What is a different way to look at this situation?
- What is the real likelihood that the worst will happen?
- What objective evidence do I have that supports my worry?
- What objective evidence do I have against this worry?
- How have I successfully coped with situations like this in the past?
- Will this matter in five years?

## Decreasing your dose of daily news

How much time do you spend watching news on television? How about reading the news in papers or magazines or on the internet? Use the table below to chart your news consumption over the course of a week. You may be surprised at how much time you spend on news.

How much time would you like to spend watching or reading news? It's OK to check the news once or twice a day, but you don't need to check news headlines every 30 minutes. If you'd like to consume less news — or reduce passive screen time in general — try to break from the habit by trying different activities that foster resiliency. Using the lists at right, select a form of news viewing or screen time you'd like to minimize. Then, choose an activity that you can use to add nonscreen time to your day.

	In the morning	During the day	At night
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

### Choose ways to reduce news viewing or screen time

- Decrease unnecessary news or television watching by selecting a time limit per day.
- Select the number of times you plan to check email during the day.
- Avoid surfing the internet unless you have a defined purpose for doing so, or a timer running to limit wandering.
- When talking to someone, focus on the conversation. Don't also watch television, browse the internet or check your phone.
- Add your own goal: \_\_\_\_\_

### Choose activities to add nonscreen time to your day

- Add a 10-minute walk to your day — or an extra, separate 10 minutes of walking — such as after lunch.
- Talk to someone you feel close to every day.
- Always have a book at hand. In addition, build a short list of books you want to read in the next six months, and set about trying to find them. Ask people who are close to you for book recommendations.
- Ask a friend for a healthy recipe — or look up a cookbook online — and spend time preparing a healthy meal.
- Add your own idea: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pick your battles

The greatest stress comes from feeling overwhelmed by the present. You have a limited amount of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energy each day. Apply your

energy to the most significant problems you can solve. To reduce stress, consider letting go of problems or worries that aren't as important or are out of your control. The exercise below provides an example of how you can map out worries and tasks and keep your to-do list manageable.

	More controllable	Not as controllable
<b>Important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Healthy eating</li> <li>■ Cultivating friendships and relationships with loved ones</li> <li>■ Managing finances</li> <li>■ Taking steps to prevent COVID-19 virus infection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Political issues</li> <li>■ Your past</li> <li>■ The lack of COVID-19 precautionary measures in public places</li> <li>■ Traffic</li> </ul>
	<b>Action:</b> Take care of these priorities, and recognize that change takes time.	<b>Action:</b> Learn from these items, and practice acceptance and forgiveness.
<b>Not as important</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Walking route your partner chooses</li> <li>■ Lack of promptness in others</li> <li>■ Differences between you and your children or grandchildren in how you live life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Your neighbor's lawn</li> <li>■ What others wear in public</li> <li>■ The bored clerk at the grocery store</li> </ul>
	<b>Action:</b> Let it go if the cost of addressing the issue in a respectful way is greater than the benefit.	<b>Action:</b> Let it go.

## Dealing with depression

People with depression report many different signs and symptoms. These include feelings of sadness or despair, loss of pleasure in things previously enjoyed, changes in appetite or weight, trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, always feeling tired or having low energy, feeling restless, having trouble concentrating or making decisions, feeling worthless or excessively guilty, drinking or taking medication more than they should, loss of self-confidence, and thoughts about death or suicide.

Others may feel angry or stressed much of the time, feel the urge to lash out at objects or other people, or just want to withdraw entirely. People with depression often feel anxious and worry more than do other people. Older adults with depression may not feel sad, but they more often report anxiety, aches and pains, memory loss, or difficulty maintaining clear thought processes. Symptoms of depression may be overshadowed or impacted by a coexisting illness, such as arthritis, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, stroke or cancer.

## Variety of treatments

Depression is a complex illness and generally isn't something that just goes away. If you think you may have symptoms of depression, talk to your health care provider. It can be as simple as saying that you haven't been yourself lately and you'd like to talk to someone about it.

Counseling (psychotherapy) and medications are common treatment options. In older adults with mild depression, psychotherapy can be just as effective as medications. For moderate to severe depression, a combination of psychotherapy and medications is usually best.

## Practice relaxation

Actively challenging your thoughts can be hard work. Luckily, another important part of stress management is taking the time to relax.

There are many activities that can help you relax. Make a list of your favorite options and add some others that you may not have tried yet. Use the suggestions below as possible options for your list, or simply use them as ideas to help get you thinking:

- Performing muscle stretches
- Listening to music or looking at art
- Going for a drive or a walk
- Finding something that makes you laugh
- Practicing tai chi, yoga or meditation
- Praying or engaging in your chosen spiritual practice
- Taking a bath or going for a swim
- Reading or listening to a book
- Taking a close look at nature, such as watching a chipmunk gather seeds
- Spend time with a pet in your lap or at your side

Put this list where you can see it. Schedule several periods of relaxation throughout your day, even if they are brief. Relaxation activities can help relieve your stress before it builds. In addition, reducing your stress during the day may help you sleep better at night, which can further boost your mood. You can also try the relaxation methods below.

## Progressive muscle relaxation

This relaxation method teaches you what tight muscles feel like — and what it feels like when you are totally relaxed. Knowing that difference can help you find stress spots in your body so that you can release the tension whenever it's needed. With practice, you will be able to notice more quickly when you have muscle tension.

- Lie flat and start at your toes or your head, whichever you prefer. Move (progress) up or down your body.
- Work on only one set of muscles at a time. Keep the rest of your body relaxed.
- Tighten all of the muscles in that group, or "zone."
- Hold the muscles tight for several seconds. Notice how it feels as you tighten the muscles. Tight muscles feel shaky and tense.
- Release the tightness in those muscles. Note the difference between the tight state and the relaxed state. Relaxed muscles feel heavy and warm.
- Move on to the next muscle group.

Face, neck and shoulders



Chest, belly and back

**As described above, progressive muscle relaxation helps teach you what the various muscle groups throughout your body feel like when they are tense or relaxed. With practice, you'll be able to more quickly notice when you have muscle tension, and you'll know how to release the tension when needed.**

**Paced, relaxed breathing**

A simple skill to try is paced, relaxed breathing. You easily can do this in almost any setting. There are many ways to practice this exercise. But all have a common goal: to have a slow, deep and consistent breathing pattern.

- Find a quiet place where you can sit or lie comfortably.
- Stretch out your shoulders and arms, then let your shoulders relax and drop.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose until you feel comfortably “full.” Try to breathe in to a count of 4, for example. Think about breathing from your abdomen so that your belly moves out (expands) as you breathe in.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4, then slowly shift to exhale.
- Breathe out slowly and smoothly to a count of at least 4. Let your belly flatten.

**Guided imagery**

The mind and body respond similarly to images, whether imagined or real. Guided imagery uses all of your senses to help shift your experience. You may be guided through your own chosen memories or into new, enjoyable images. Guided imagery is, by definition, guided by someone. The guidance can come through a voice on a guided imagery recording or in person by someone trained in this practice.

However, you can also think of the imagery on your own. As you begin, do relaxed breathing. Then imagine a relaxing place — somewhere you’d like to be. Use your five senses to picture every detail about this place. Make it “alive,” or vivid, in your mind. What do you see here? What do you hear? What do you smell in the air? If you’d eat something here, what would you taste? What do you feel under your feet and in your hands? Also think about what you do when you are here. How do you relax? Use your senses again and repeat the questions as you think about relaxing in that scene.

**Being mindful with meditation**

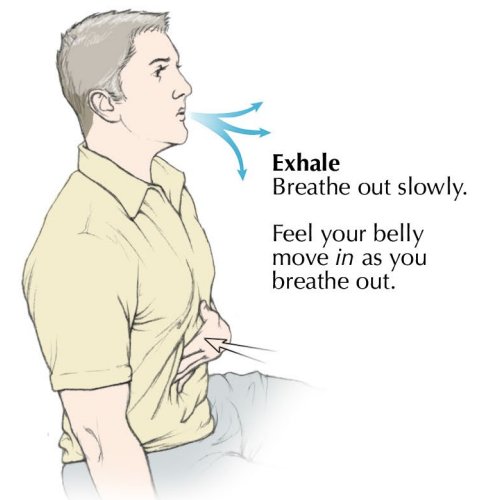
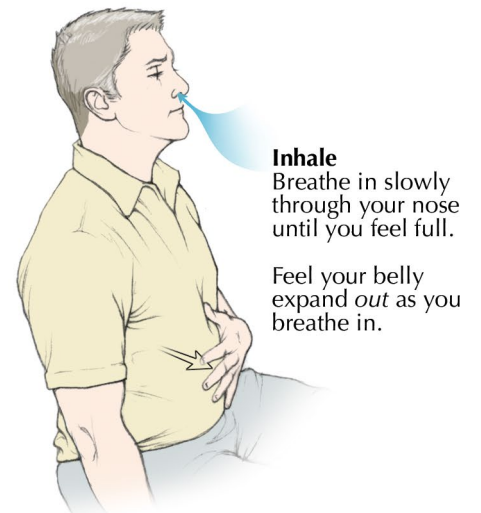
Mindfulness can be a helpful way to lower stress. Worries force you to focus inward on distressing thoughts. Mindfulness helps you learn how to shift your focus to the environment around you.

When you are mindful, you don’t fight or struggle with your thoughts. You learn how to direct your attention and awareness back to the present moment. Mindfulness is about focus — on only what is happening right now. You focus with intention and purpose, without judgment. When you are being mindful, you are present in the moment and accept the moment as it is. This practice can reduce stress while building resilience. Try these tips to practice mindfulness:

- Choose a quiet space where you won’t be interrupted.
- Sit comfortably, noticing how the chair is supporting your body.
- Close your eyes, relax your muscles, and breathe slowly and naturally.
- Slowly repeat a focus phrase (mantra), such as “calm.” When other thoughts intrude, calmly make note of it, and then bring your attention back to your focus phrase or to the present.
- When you are finished, sit quietly for a moment.

**You’re not alone**

Although it may feel that way in times of quarantine or social distancing, it’s important to remember that you’re not alone. If you’re struggling with your emotional well-being, ask for help — whether it’s from a friend, a loved one or a health care provider. Many resources are available to help. □



**There are many ways to practice deep breathing, but the common goal is to have a slow, deep and consistent breathing pattern.**

**Self-harm**

If you’re feeling suicidal or thinking of hurting yourself, seek help. Contact your primary care provider or a mental health professional for resources in your area. Or call a hotline such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255) or use its webchat at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat>.

## How can you calm your mind?

### *Imagine it is spring 2025*

Tucked in your blanket, trying to sleep at night, your mind travels back five years to the year 2020.

You remember the fear — fearing doorknobs, grocery bags, light switches, sneezes, handshakes and hugs.

You remember the sadness — the loss of freedom, time with colleagues, birthday parties, sleepovers, visits to the mall.

You remember the anger — anger at human greed, irrationality, willful ignorance.

You remember the grief — sobbing at the loss of fellow beings who breathed their last breaths alone in an ICU to the sound of a ventilator.

But it's not all negative.

You remember the love — sticking hearts on the windows, spending quality time with loved ones.

You remember the kindness — making small sacrifices, giving an extra tip, supporting those struggling.

You remember the gratitude — grateful for the gift of food, deep breath and togetherness.

You remember the meaning — coming closer as a family, choosing to forgive, working on personal well-being.

### *Coming back to today*

COVID-19 is one of the worst threats our world has seen. It has disrupted our lives, finances, freedom, relationships and sense of security. It has brought loneliness, uncertainty and losses. No one knows when this will end. Are we looking at a second wave, a third wave, a fourth wave? How can you calm your mind, let alone feel upbeat?

Here are three thoughts shared as three steps.

■ *The first step* — Acknowledge that COVID-19 has created a heavier load than your mind can lift. Accept that the feelings of fear, sadness, anger and grief are natural. The negative feelings are part of the mental potpourri. No need to stifle them. When you accept these feelings, they loosen their grip. They free your attention to embrace the present moment.

■ *The second step* — Spend more time in the present moment with your attention tethered to your senses — flowing with your breath, watching the sunset colors,

smelling the aroma of coffee, feeling your feet on the floor, admiring your loved one's eyes. Externally focused attention frees your mind from its fatiguing wanderings.

■ *The third step* — The present moment opens the door to a well of comfort and positivity, experiencing compassion, gratitude, love and meaning. You think about those who have it worse. You feel grateful for the ordinary and simple. You prioritize affiliative moments. You think about the larger meaning of your life.

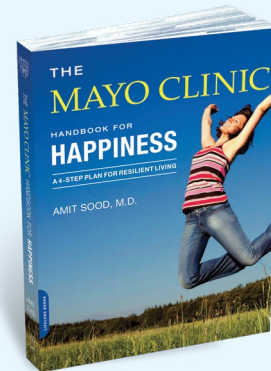
Once your brain fills with these uplifting feelings, fear and anger slowly fade. They are still there, but they no longer dominate your thought flow.

With repeated practice, the feelings you nurture start multiplying. Thus, the more you focus on compassion, gratitude and meaning, the bigger space they occupy in your brain's real estate.

Acknowledge your fear and convert it into proactive actions that help you secure safety. Once you have done that, embrace the splendor of the present and fill it with uplifting thoughts and perceptions.

On a peaceful night in spring 2025, tucked in your blanket, when you will think about this day in 2020, you might remember the fear and sadness, but I hope you will quickly move to love and kindness. You will turn on your side, smile and lose yourself into the world of your dreams.

— Amit Sood, M.D.



**Amit Sood, M.D., is the author of *The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living* and *The Mayo Clinic Handbook for Happiness*.**

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