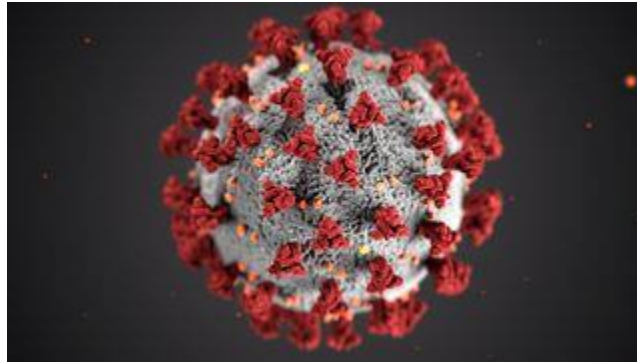# The COVID-19 Wellness and Coping Toolkit

## 11 Tips for Healthcare Workers, Patients, and the Public

*Posted Mar 31, 2020   Beth Darnall PhD*



*Source: Photo by CDC on Unsplash*

COVID-19 presents new challenges for everyone, including front-line healthcare workers.

These new and daunting circumstances require careful attention to self-care, stress management, and wellness practices to best ensure your continued health and performance in a time of great need.

**11 Strategies for Coping and Wellness During COVID-19:**

1. Take stock. As routines drastically change, health choices may falter. Ask yourself how you are doing in regard to daily health behaviors: the quantity and quality of sleep, exercise, nutrition, and hydration.

2. Stabilize yourself with good health behaviors. After taking stock, choose one area for improvement and set a goal. Examples of concrete goals may be 30 minutes of daily exercise, limiting evening screen time in the hours before bed, and eating three servings of vegetables daily. COVID-19 brings a high degree of uncertainty, and feelings of loss control are common. Setting a self-care goal can help keep you grounded and focused on things you can control. Good self-care will ensure your immune system is best supported and able to fight illness. Remember too that when you are well-cared for, you can be of better service to others.

3. Observe your stress level. Stress manifests mentally, emotionally, and physically. Observe the tension level in your muscles, frequency and intensity of any difficult emotions, and potential physical effects such as headaches, upset stomach, or difficulty sleeping.

4. Identify your emotions. Anxiety, sadness, fear, anger, frustration may be common. Acknowledge these emotions as they arise. Often, these emotions are temporary and observing them without judgment can allow them to dissipate quicker.

5. Calm your nervous system. Stress activates the sympathetic nervous system and keeps you in a state of "high alert." Even low-grade prolonged stress can have negative impacts on sleep, mood, blood pressure, cortisol — all of which reduce your tolerance to future stressors. Ongoing stress can also promote unhelpful choices, like using alcohol for stress relief, and further deplete sleep, mood, and energy. In this time of COVID-19, stress mitigation is key, and calming your nervous system is medicinal.

If you have a favorite stress reduction tool, ask yourself if you are using it frequently enough. If you do not have a favorite stress reduction tool, below are two free options:

- [Shine: Calm Anxiety & Stress](#) offers a special toolkit for COVID-19 anxiety. This app is free, offers guided relaxation and meditations, daily motivational messages, and "ask an expert" section.

- [Calm Your Nervous System](#) with a free, streamable, 20-minute guided relaxation audio file. Using headphones or earbuds allows background binaural technology to deepen your relaxation response (by Beth Darnall, Ph.D.).

Use your favorite tool daily or as needed throughout the day to de-stress, interrupt any unhelpful thought patterns, and as a general wellness practice.

6. Have compassion with yourself and others. Recognize that everyone is doing their best in this time of crisis, including yourself. Remind yourself that everyone is navigating unchartered territory without a playbook. Anchor yourself and avoid reacting to the emotional instability of others. Use any of the calming tools listed above or another you may love.

7. Stay socially connected. Social connection is certainly different with 'physical distancing' — and it may be more important than ever. Reach out to others by phone, email, text, or various social media platforms. Check in with older adults, anyone you know to be socially isolated, and daily friends and colleagues who you do not have contact with now due to quarantine or shelter in place orders.

8. Find [personal space](#) in isolation. Paradoxically, physical distancing is forcing people and families in close proximity for extended periods of time. During a stable time of emotional neutrality, discuss individual needs for personal space and develop a plan.

9. Set a timer and limit your access to the news. Reports of mounting disease and death counts can be distressing and anxiety-provoking. The volatility of the stock market and loss of investment and [retirement](#) income may represent a personal threat to security and trigger anxiety or despair. While staying informed is important, limiting news and screen time can support stress management and mental health. If you find yourself constantly scanning the news, consider containing your news checking to twice daily and for a defined and brief period of time.

10. Understand your local supports. If you are part of an organization, ask [leadership](#) about local COVID-19 coping resources such as group supports or individual psychological [counseling](#). Many places are offering services free of charge.

11. [Gratitude](#) and positivity. Daily, find a positive story in the news that illustrates [resilience](#) and positivity amidst challenge. Allow yourself to reflect on one personal gratitude each day.

References

Darnall, BD. [Staying Sane and Current on COVID-19: Advice and resources, by specialty, for those caring for patients](#). March 27, 2020.