

5 Ways to Reduce Stress: Boost Your Immune System While Social Distancing

As COVID-19 continues to spread and we make lifestyle adjustments in response, the challenge is to maintain your mental and physical health in light of mounting stress. These strategies will help.

As social distancing becomes our new “norm” over at least the next several weeks, the pressures may be overwhelming. There are challenges finding childcare and keeping necessities stocked, never mind keeping yourself safe at work and out in the world. And how much disinfectant is enough, anyway? We all need to think about practical coping strategies while dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are five to employ today:

1. **USE FACTS AND PRECAUTIONS TO MANAGE YOUR FEAR.**

The unknown can be scary and can overwhelm us. Fear can inflate negative thoughts, which leads to unhealthy stress. Ongoing stress releases hormones that get us ready for emergencies, but also *severely depress our immune systems*¹. Combat this fear by acting on facts, not misinformation. Look at the statistics and the real numbers of infections being reported by the Centers for Disease Control and local/national officials. You can tackle fear by facing it head-on with facts and smart precautions like handwashing, disinfecting surfaces, and social distancing.

2. **BE SMART ABOUT SOCIAL AND TV TIME.**

Social media platforms can cause incredible anxiety as rumors and misinformation spread on them. Limit time on social media, and don't instigate hysteria by reposting unvetted information. Limit your children's exposure to television news. Their perspective is different than adults', and they will have difficulty processing the facts. Children also notice our emotional state, so try to stay calm and provide facts to help them understand the situation and how everyone can get through this together.

3. **GET SOME PHYSICAL EXERCISE.**

Exercise your body to help keep your mind in check. In fact, aerobic exercise is as important for your head as it is for your heart. It has a unique capacity to exhilarate and relax, provide stimulation and calm, as well as counter depression and dissipate stress². So, take a walk, a run, or even tune in to one of the thousands of free online yoga, meditation or workout videos. Dust off your weight bench and take the laundry off the treadmill. Get on it. Use it.

4. **HELP EACH OTHER.**

Social distancing does not mean you shouldn't seek and give support. The upside to social media is that we truly are more connected than ever before. Find out who needs help and offer it, in a way that keeps everyone safe and cared for. Even with social distancing, you can drop off medicine or supplies to a neighbor or friend. Call your church or check in with your online groups to find out who needs a meal that can be left on their

doorstep, or a prescription delivered. And of course, if you bought lots of “bulk extras,” maybe spare a few food or household items for those who weren’t able to stock up. Be creative to ensure our social distancing doesn’t lead to emotional distancing for those most in need. doesn’t lead to emotional distancing for those most in need.

5. LIMIT POOR NUTRITIONAL HABITS THAT WEAKEN YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM.

One habit to curb is eating or drinking more than 100 grams (8 tbsp) of sugar a day³. That much sugar reduces your white blood cells’ ability to kill germs by 40%! Also limit your alcohol intake as studies show that three or more alcoholic drinks daily is enough to suppress your immunity.

If anxiety or stress interfere with your ability to function or care for yourself or your family, seek professional help. Check in with your personal physician, contact your company- sponsored Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if you have one, or call a support line like the National Suicide Prevention

