



COLLEGE OF
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Tips for effective coping

by Dr. Thad Leffingwell

The new normal of social distancing and shelter-in-place is challenging for all of us. Not only is it disruptive to our daily routines and favorite activities, but it creates stress and anxiety as we face an uncertain future and timeline. Worries about our health, our finances, and our family and loved ones seem to increase almost daily. Dr. Thad Leffingwell, a clinical health psychologist and head of the Department of Psychology, offers the following tips for effective coping.

1. **Structure your day as much as possible.** Unstructured days and loss of routines are fun for vacations, but can add to the stress of our current situation. Structure days for you and your family with scheduled activities. Focus on things that bring you joy, or give you a sense of mastery and accomplishment.
2. **Take care of your body and mind.** Our current mode of “social distancing” and “self-quarantines” can also break our self-care habits and stress-eating can draw us to less healthy food options. Be as active and eat healthy options as much as possible. Get out of your seat and stand and move often. This will not only be good for your mood and health overall, but will help your immune system be most effective.
3. **Limit news and social media intake.** Information overload about the coronavirus is easy to slip into. While it is reasonable and responsible to stay tuned in and informed, it isn’t necessary to be “plugged in” all the time. Take breaks.
4. **Stay in the present.** The current situation is certainly stressful, and it seems even more so because our mind (and the news) drift to the “what ifs” of a worrisome future that may arrive. It is a wonderful skill of our minds to predict and plan, but sometimes that can be a trap. Use mindfulness techniques to practice returning to the “here and now” of this moment as a way to counteract the worry trap.
5. **Be patient.** While the current situation is stressful and challenging, remind yourself that it is temporary. The one consistent thing in life is change, and there will come a time when life returns to normal.
6. **Be grateful.** Even in the midst of stress and challenge, gratitude is a timeless and powerful psychological antidote. Take time to count blessings, even now, and you will find that it reduces stress and prepares you to cope with whatever challenges we have in the moment.