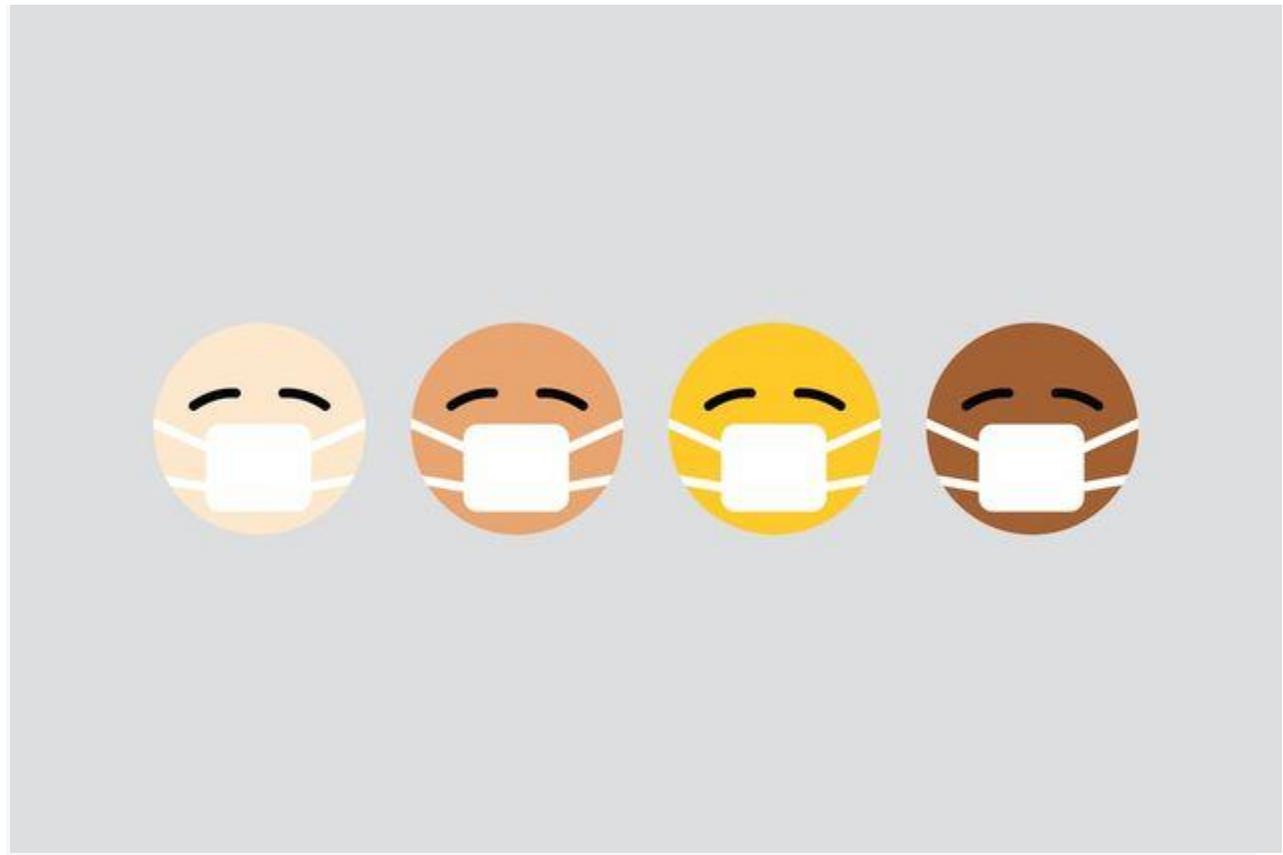


# Coping with Coronavirus Stress

Four mental health strategies to help you during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Have you been noticing a spike in your stress as a result of COVID-19? If so, you certainly aren't alone. Pandemics are not declared lightly, and an increase in your stress is actually a normal response. However, not only is stress unpleasant, it can also hinder your immunity. The World Health Organization emphasizes that preventative care plays a crucial role in fighting the Coronavirus, therefore, it's helpful to boost your coping in an effort to improve your overall well-being. Here are four strategies to help you maintain your mental wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## **Recognize your stress**

Stress is a normal part of life. It is a natural response to an external pressure that disrupts your equilibrium. It often causes symptoms such as:

- Sadness, confusion, irritability, anger, uneasiness, and suicidal thoughts
- Reduced concentration, efficiency, and productivity
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Interpersonal problems (e.g., lies, defensiveness, communication concerns)
- Tension (e.g., headaches, jaw clenching, teeth grinding)
- Body pain (e.g., headaches, muscle spasms)
- Reduced energy (e.g., tiredness, weakness, fatigue)
- Sleeping problems (e.g., insomnia, nightmares)

The first important step to managing these symptoms is to recognize that they are related to stress. According to the Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence, the ability to recognize your emotional state is essential in order to understand and manage your emotions. Therefore, if you skip the phase of acknowledging that you are stressed, you impede your ability to manage your stress.

This notion may seem simple, but it's often easier said than done. It's common to miss the signs of stress early on, preventing your ability to handle them before they grow. Even if you notice these symptoms, it's also tempting to think that you can manage them by brushing them under the rug. The danger in this tactic is that it doesn't allow you to tackle the problem head on, and the catalyst of time can cause you to miss the crucial moment to intervene before your stress becomes overwhelming.

If you have been noticing these symptoms since you learned about the Coronavirus, it is possible that you may be experiencing a normal stress response. Not only is it natural to be concerned about physical illness, but the uncertainty about a spreading virus can increase your stress level as well. The World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 as a pandemic

to highlight the level of concern and spark measures of precaution. In a parallel process, your stress is doing the same for you as it sets off a warning alarm that calls you to action.

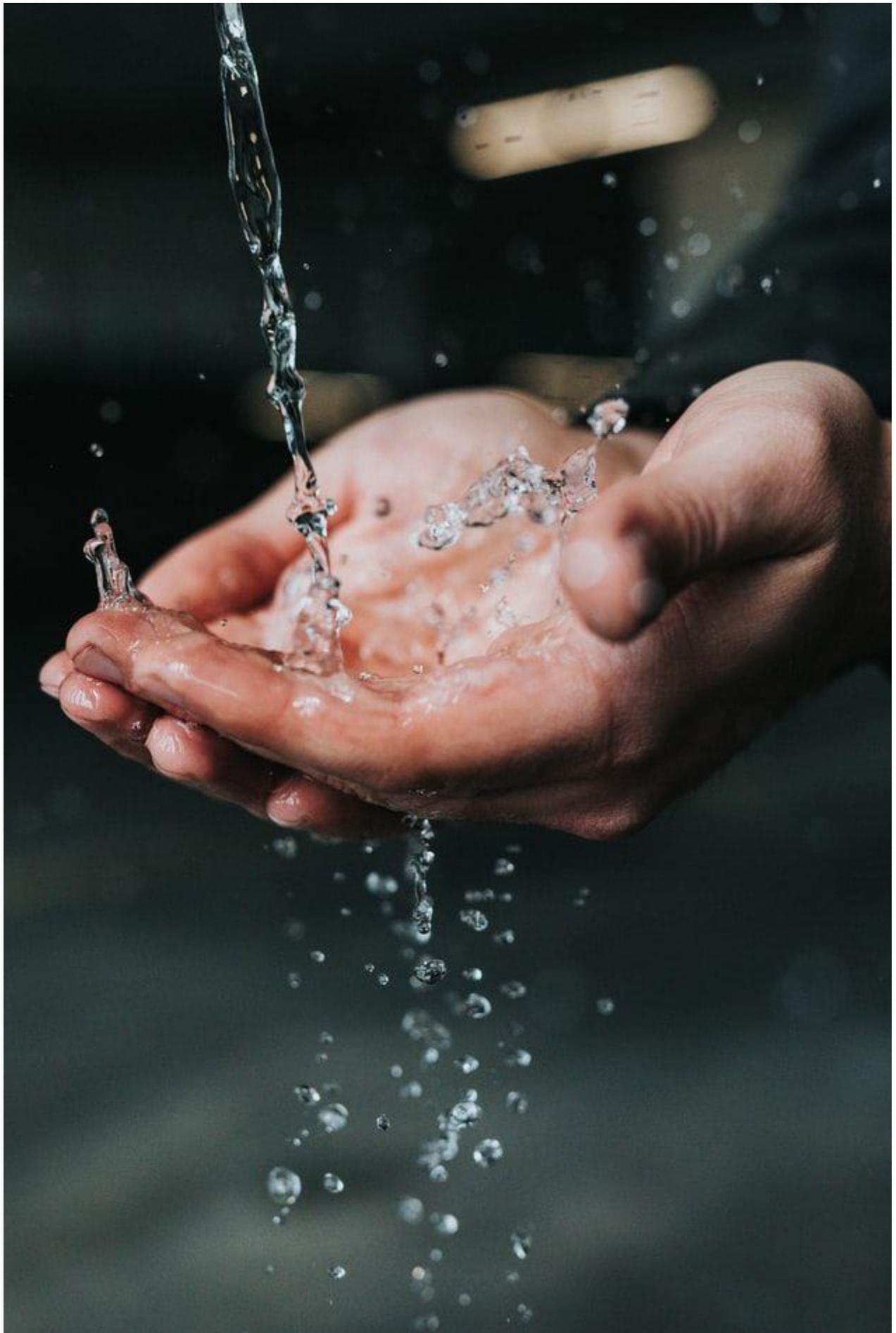
Manage what you can; release what you cannot.

Once you acknowledge your stress, you are able to trace the stressor can help you to tackle the problem at hand. Understanding the issue can help you to problem-solve. If used as a signal, your stress can motivate you to manage what you can. Taking action to combat a part of the problem can help you to reduce your symptoms.

As information on COVID-19 continues to develop, it is important to stay updated with information from reputable sources such as this prevention guide and this myth busting list from The World Health Organization.

While the current knowledge we have pertaining to the Coronavirus is increasing, there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding the virus. Recognizing this, it is important to manage what you can with the information you are provided but also release the need to control what you cannot. A key difference between stress and anxiety is the false sense of control that may arise from over worrying and overcompensating. While there are a lot of attempts to fill in the gaps to inform us about COVID-19, falling in to false information or conspiracy theories may not be the best method for your stress management. In addition to seeking information from reputable sources, try to be mindful of the myths that may be misleading and pulling your focus from what you can control.

This is *not* a suggestion to abandon your methods of preparation, but to do so in an informed manner. Instead of adding to your stress by trying to control elements beyond your grasp, try to follow expert guide to manage what you can and let go of the temptation to try to control what you cannot.



## **Know your limits**

When you pay attention to your stress management, you will begin to notice a pattern that will signal your threshold of tolerance. While this may change over time, it is helpful to pay attention to trends of what makes your stress better or worse. As we have explored, ignoring your signs, overextending yourself, and delving into fictional sources may make your stress worse, therefore, these may be helpful areas to start building boundaries to protect your well-being. For example, perhaps you can benefit from creating a habit of checking in with your emotions in order to avoid overlooking your stress.

Another example is to limit your consumption of news. You may do this by refining your information to reputable sources, setting a time for when you can check the news, and limiting the amount of updates you explore with the individuals in your life. Your limits may vary based on who you are, how you handle stress, and the level of stress you are experiencing. It may be a process to attune the boundaries you need, however, creating these limitations are certainly a helpful tactic to reduce the amount of stress you let into your life.

## **Practice self-care**

Self-care is the active process of acknowledging and tending to your needs. Self-care includes practices that invest in your general wellness. This can include preventative measures such as eating nutritious foods, staying active, and getting adequate rest.

When you are stressed, you require a specific form of intervention self-care: coping. Your coping mechanisms are the methods that you use in an effort to moderate your stress. Therefore, if you pay attention to the symptoms that arise when you are stressed, you may find clues into the right coping mechanisms for you. Let's say you are showing signs of confusion, body aches, and fatigue. From this acknowledgement, you may gather that you may need ample rest. Then, you may tailor your self-care to include a break, stretching, or sleep in order to meet this need.

Another way to deduce what coping skills work is by reflecting on your past. Think about another time that you were stressed, what helped to ground you at that time? Past coping practices that have been deemed successful may be helpful in the present as well.

When it comes to self-care, the more strategies you have in your toolkit, the better. The coping skills that work for you may vary per context, and having a plethora of options allows you to be better equipped to handle your stress. Say for example you have learned in the past that going to a yoga class helps you to reduce your level of stress. If you rely on this sole option and your area experiences a lockdown you may find your coping hindered.

If your go-to coping skills are difficult to use in the context of COVID-19 precautions, be creative. Take the opportunity to explore related skills. Using the example above, perhaps you can use a workout app, follow a guided meditation, or practice deep-breathing from your home.

Make the most of the reality that you are in. Instead of focusing on all the things you cannot do due to certain restrictions can you shift your focus to the coping mechanisms that you now have the opportunity to delve into?