

Understanding Stress

Managing Anxiety under COVID-19

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Agenda

- ▶ Stress in the time of Coronavirus
- ▶ Understanding how stress works
- ▶ What does Scripture say about Anxiety & Stress
- ▶ Ways we can address Anxiety & Stress today
- ▶ Squeeze Out Stress - a progressive muscle relaxation strategy



Life under Coronavirus - What's Happening to our Bodies?

- ▶ Some are working less, some (first responders are working more) - either can be stressful
- ▶ Gyms & parks closed - perhaps getting less physical exercise
- ▶ Getting less human connection
- ▶ Watching more news - this is also stressful
- ▶ We feel out of control - sometimes more emotional
- ▶ Getting more sleep, but sometimes still feeling exhausted
 - ▶ Sometimes extreme fatigue is your body's natural reaction to stress

First, we are on emotional overload. Many of us are feeling anxious, which activates our sympathetic nervous system. That system is responsible for our fight-or-flight response, and for triggering our adrenaline. The stress we are all under leads to some adrenal fatigue, which causes our bodies to need a break, and we automatically shut down

Second, we are not interacting with the world in the same way. Often the things with which we interact are the things that stimulate us and get us excited. Losing that excitement also can cause us to feel more tired.

Third, we aren't outside as much, which leads to a deficiency of vitamin D. This can cause us to be more tired, too

How our bodies react to stress and trauma is a biological mechanism. And it's working on overdrive in these unprecedented times!

Stress,, is a term used for the processes that are involved when we are challenged or overwhelmed by stimuli or events, either external or internal. It's tied to the body having a stress biology, and being hardwired to react ... and

Stress- what does it do to our bodies?



Unnatural Causes - Multiple Stress Factors & Social Indicators of Health

What Does Scripture Say about Anxiety & Stress?

- ▶ When the cares of my heart are many, Your consolations cheer my soul - Psalm 94:19
- ▶ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light - Matthew 11:28-30
- ▶ Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved - Psalm 55:22
- ▶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you 1 Peter 5:6-7

Matthew 6: 25-34 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[a]? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you— you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

These are probably the most well-known verses on managing our worry. I found over 30 verses in scripture that talk about managing worry or fear. God talks about this a lot, because He knows it’s an issue with which all humans struggle. We matter to God, he knows our concerns, worries and anxieties and He cares for us. He desires to walk with us, to sustain us, to unburden us from our stress and anxiety.



At the same time, being asked to simply “not worry” is a tall order. So, let’s talk about some ways that we can let go of some of our stress and anxiety

As this graphic shows, you can focus on what you can control while acknowledging what you don’t control.

Accept that life will be different for the foreseeable future.

Know that there are a lot of things out of your control, and that flexibility will continue to be required. Focus your energy and attention on the things you can control, such as your attitude toward these adjustments, and your efforts to take care of yourself and others. Arm yourself with accurate information.

Addressing Stress under COVID-19

- ▶ Cultivate a positive outlook
 - ▶ Watch Less News!
- ▶ Create a Routine (and stick to it)
- ▶ Don't let "social distancing" turn into "social isolation"
 - ▶ Stay Connected
- ▶ Make extra time for self-care
- ▶ Notice when you are feeling anxious (and take steps to regulate)
 - ▶ Move your Body
- ▶ Establish Healthy Sleep Patterns

Cultivate a positive outlook.

Limit your intake of news and social media if it is increasing your anxiety. Focus on the expert information sources rather than the latest sensational post or headline. Create a schedule of when you check it and stick to it. Reducing exposure to the news can help you manage your anxiety more effectively. Just as we take care of our physical hygiene, consider your media hygiene (e.g. when you look at news, the kind of news you look at, etc).

Develop a "learner's mindset" about the challenges you are facing. What do they teach you about your values, your coping strategies, and your relationships? How can you learn as much as possible from this situation?

Remember that you have made it through challenges in the past, and think about the internal resources and the support systems that helped you get through them. Identifying the coping strategies that you already have and how you can activate them in your present situation.

Intentionally seek out posts and people that bring you hope. Spend time each day identifying things for which you feel grateful.

Do not assume the worst. It is easy to focus on crisis scenarios, especially when those around us are

Create a Routine – and stick to it.

So, now that our old structures have gone out the window, what do we do? For starters, finding a routine during this time of uncertainty is also a way to navigate your anxiety and provide stability. This is a new space for all of us — we've not been here before. But try to build out an alternate set of activities and routines that would actually involve you in life, such as building a morning routine, staying in contact with friends and family, having specific exercise times and healthy meal times — even taking time to create a list of “pleasant activities” that would be good to engage in, whether cooking, singing or dancing, can be very important to helping us feel connected. Structure can help create a sense of control and safety for our well-being. Developing rhythms of rest, exercise, work time, recreation time, and connection time can create a sense of stability and make us more productive. Don't forget to build in intentional breaks to move your body, change tasks, and rest from screen time throughout your day.

Develop goals. Think about the plans you had that you can still accomplish, perhaps with some adjustments. Identify the new opportunities that you may have to do things you did not expect. We can get overwhelmed by all the things that we feel like we could or should be doing. Make it easier on yourself by focusing on one thing at a time.

Be careful that “social distancing” doesn't turn into “social isolation.” Stay Connected

The goal is to reduce contact between large numbers of people - but isolation can have a negative impact on mental health. As Christians, we already understand that we have been created for community – community with God and with one another. We're talking about staying connected to each other and to God. So, how do we work on those connections during a time of physical distancing? Schedule Zoom meetings with friends and be sure to stay in touch with family. Although we have to be physically distant, we do not have to be socially distant. Connection is a powerful protective factor, and one we should try to create as much as possible. Our church is offering times of prayer, which are also points of connection. Many of you who now homeschooling in addition to working from home, may find it hard to connect with others and God in the day to day. But even small connections help. I've been using the daily prayer app that Steve recommended in a sermon several weeks ago. The best is that I can use it in the presence of kids or other chaos. The church has open community groups. There are opportunities to connect with a Stephen Ministry or a counselor at Berkeley Christian Counselors should you desire more support.

Develop ways to stay connected to your support system. Take advantage of online resources to chat and enjoy time with friends and family remotely. Stay aware of those around you, and take the initiative to reach out to others. Remember especially those who are most vulnerable to illness or stress; offering mutual support can be

Make extra time for self-care. Times of higher stress require us to be more intentional about taking care of ourselves. Remember basic healthy coping strategies such as developing a routine, spending time outside, exercising, getting enough sleep, eating regularly and staying hydrated, and focusing on things other than this disease.

Notice when you are feeling anxious, and take small steps to regulate yourself, such as Moving Your Body:

MOVE YOUR BODY - Making sure that your routine includes physical movement — whether a full-on workout on a nice long walk - Movement is so important in helping one's mood. This change in lifestyle may cause us to work out less or move less. It's important to find ways to keep moving, as it stimulates our dopamine and helps change our mood to a more energized, positive one.

Ways to quickly rebuild energy level in a pinch is to do something as simple of five or 10 minutes of stretching or yoga. It's slow, you get involved, and that starts to relieve some of the exhaustion. It's not one-size-fits-all, and knowing there are options is really important. Stretching ... or lying flat on the floor and focusing on your breath is a way to give yourself permission to focus inward and find some peace. It's a way of slowing down the machine.

We're going to do a progressive muscle relaxation today – which is something you can do, as time permits, to help you regulate your stress and emotions.

ESTABLISH HEALTHY SLEEP PATTERNS

People benefit physically, mentally, and emotionally from developing healthy sleep habits. This includes avoiding the news right before trying to go to sleep. Avoiding screens in bed is also a good practice. Next, take time to breathe. This may sound simple, but sleep experts recommend that you find a calming breath sequence that you can practice regularly. We are going to practice one together today. And, while moving your body is a really great thing, most experts suggest avoiding heart-rate raising exercise at night – as it takes your body a while to calm down and for adrenaline to dissipate. You may want to consider taking time to journal or write down worries and concerns for 5-10 minutes before bed. Holding onto anxieties can lead to a mental flood of worry as you try to sleep, but writing them down – or offloading them from your mind can help clear the mental slate and help you sleep. Avoid alcohol and caffeine before bed. While it's tempting to use alcohol for anxiety reduction and sleep, it can lead you to feeling sluggish and can disturb normal sleep rhythms, meaning you make wake at night and struggle to return to restful sleep. Likewise, caffeine can inhibit your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

So, while life feels out of regular rhythm during this time, it's important to build regular, healthy and calming rhythms and stick to them during this time.

Squeeze Out Stress

- ▶ Practicing together a calming breath stress management tool