Staying Healthy During Times of Stress

Your UHC Nurse

Amy

By Amy Hertog, RN, BSN, Clinical Nurse Liaison

Stress is a natural reaction that occurs when our brains perceive a threat. However, sustained stress has certain drawbacks to our overall health. Stress can make healthy people more vulnerable to sickness by weakening their immune system. Managing our overall health during times of stress is important to our well-being.

Signs of stress include:

- Apathy, lack of energy
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty “keeping track” of things
- Feeling on edge
- A change in eating habits
- Sleeping more than usual or difficulty getting to sleep
- Being more emotional
- Using alcohol or drugs to relieve or forget stress

In this time of uncertainty and so much change, adapting to a “new normal” and developing new routines can help you feel more in control of your health, even when the circumstances around you are out of your control. Keep in mind that you also have the ability to ease into new routines by taking small steps toward a health goal.

Gain a sense of control and ease worry by taking care of yourself in these ways:

- Proper nourishment is critical to good health. Stress sometimes compels us to grab unhealthy foods.

Dear fellow employee,

When we wrote and published last month’s newsletter, it was inconceivable we’d find ourselves in the midst of this health crisis. If you’re like me, you may be experiencing what feels like whiplash. In the span of only a few weeks, our daily lives turned upside down and the days and weeks ahead are uncertain and filled with worry. Things just don’t feel right.

The way we experience this unease is uniquely our own. If you work directly with the public or out in the field, you may worry about safety and others practicing (or not practicing) safe behaviors that put you at risk. If you’re working from home, getting used to new technology, juggling home schooling if you have children, and feeling isolated or lonely—especially if you live alone—could be the cause of worry. You may be scared for loved ones who are at a higher risk of infection.

However this feels to you, what we’re all feeling is grief.

Grief is a way we deal with loss of any kind, not only losing someone we know. It’s ironic that we wrote about coping with grief last month. I’d like to come back to it because today, we’re experiencing loss of our daily life as we know it. For now, this is our “new normal.” We don’t know how long it will last, but what’s certain is that even when the threat of COVID-19 subsides, our lives will be different than before COVID-19 (or B.C., as one of my friends calls it).

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Virtual Visits are Convenient and Confidential

Talk with a counselor by phone or video in the privacy of your home.

Visit www.pinellascounty.org/hr/EAP.
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Among the new buzzwords in the news, social distancing is by far one of the most common. It’s important to understand the difference between social and physical distancing. COVID-19 team leads, the medical profession and officials are all calling for social distancing but what they’re really recommending is physical distancing. Restricting how far away we stand from one another, as well as direct physical contact—such as handshakes and hugs—minimizes the chance of infection. Although we need to stay 6 feet away from others and be physically distant, now more than ever, social connection is vital for our emotional health.

If you’re at home, unhealthy food is an even bigger temptation than usual. Assess your fridge and pantry and weed out snacks high in fat, sugar and sodium/salt. Instead, stock your shelves with whole grains, lean protein, vegetables, and fruits. Having these on hand will make it more likely you reach for them when you feel like eating. Take the time to plan your meals and snacks so that you are less likely to stray from a healthy diet.

Getting enough sleep is essential to a healthy immune system and makes us better handle stress. Unfortunately, stress has a sneaky way of interfering with our sleep pattern, which can create a vicious cycle. Avoid that “later in the day” caffeine. Alcohol can also prevent good sleep. Stick to a regular bed-time. Remember to “unplug” before you go to sleep. That means turning off the television, putting the cell phone away, dimming the lights, and giving yourself enough time for your body to prepare for sleep.

You still need to exercise and how you choose to do it is up to you. Exercise can help us to manage stress by causing our bodies to release endorphins (those “feel good” hormones). Home-based workouts are free, easy to do, and there are plentiful resources such as websites, apps, and DVDs. You may even find that you have some forgotten resistance bands or a long neglected Wii-fit tucked in the back of a closet.

Beyond your physical health, remember to nurture your mental health. Be compassionate to yourself. Set aside some time for yourself each day. Meditation, reading, gardening, or doing a quiet activity that you enjoy can help you to de-stress.

Virtual Visits makes medical treatment convenient by connecting you to a doctor through your smartphone, tablet or computer. Doctors can even write prescriptions for you to pick up at a local pharmacy.

Virtual Visits: Talk with a doctor by phone or video 24/7

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View January’s To Your Health article for more information. Also view this member resource page on UHC.com or log in to myUHC.com to get started. *During the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth copays are waived for all visits, including those that are COVID-19-related.*

Take advantage of technology and set up a virtual get together with friends. Facetime with grandma. Remember to reach out to anyone you know who may be more isolated at this time. If technology isn’t your thing, simply pick up the phone.

If you have kids, don’t forget they’re missing their friends and the social interaction they get at school or daycare. Encourage them to connect with their friends the same way.

Find more tips from Savello in 6 Unexpected Ways to Feel Connected in a Quarantine. And download the Sanvello app for lots of other ways to be mindful.

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Being cooped up at home, boredom and stress can result in frequent trips to the fridge. Keep your eating habits and waist line in check with these tips:

- **Stock your pantry with these basic staples**, that way, you’ll have a variety of foods on hand.

- **Pre-make healthy grab-n-go snacks.**
  - Fruits and vegetables are a great place to start. Portion them out in container or zip lock bags and put them in a highly visible place in the pantry or refrigerator. Keep a fruit bowl out on the counter.
  - Make a healthy version of a sweet treat, portion, wrap individually and freeze. This is a great way to swap out a sugar-loaded, processed treat for a healthier version. Check out this healthy fudgy brownie recipe from Rally. There’s a surprise ingredient full of fiber and protein. They’re delicious, so be adventurous and give them a try. You can even get the kids involved for added fun.
  
  - **Cook once, clean once, eat twice!** If you don’t already utilize the power of your freezer to save time and money, do it now. Make a double batch of one meal and freeze the extra. Instead of ordering a pizza next time you don’t feel like cooking, reach into the freezer for a quick and healthy meal.

- **Practice mindful eating.** For some, stress stimulates appetite. Mindful eating helps to determine actual hunger levels versus just a craving. It can change your relationship with food and discover the joy of being in the moment.

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**Exercise**

**Take It Outside**

Fresh air and sunshine are good for you. Going outdoors:

- increases Vitamin D
- improves brain function and memory
- boosts energy
- reduces stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms
- may lower blood pressure

Go for a walk or hop on your bike. However you choose to do it, just do it!

**MORE OPTIONS**

7 Home Workouts You Can Try Right Now
More workouts for beginners and older adults

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**Mental Health**

**Complete the Daily Well-being Checklist**

This daily checklist encourages us to take care of our bodies, our hearts and our minds and will provide some structure to the day.
Getting Started - Focus on the Process

In 2019, I committed to improving how I feel physically and mentally through cultivating my athletic ability. I focused on the process instead of the outcome and placed emphasis on belief in myself and my ability to change. I dedicated my time and energy to this endeavor. No pressure, no counting, no beating myself up when I made mistakes. The weight I lost in a year is significant, but a number on a scale was never the point. I rarely weigh myself. I have experienced more success with this methodology than in any of the years I have battled with self-worth and body image.

A Workout That Brings You Joy

It started with a 6-month membership to a kickboxing gym. 9Round Fitness offers a different workout every day that includes trainers and consists of nine, three-minute stations for strength training, kickboxing and core work. I eagerly dedicate my time to a workout regimen that energizes me and brings me joy. I made a point of getting to know the trainers and fellow members at both locations I go to and found a true sense of community. I appreciate spending my time with them as much as I enjoy the workouts.

Finding Inspiration

When I first joined, another member inspired me with her two-a-day workouts. I decided this was something I could dedicate myself to. Rather than having the expectation of weight loss I chose the mindset of gaining strength and achieving a goal—complete 100 workouts in 3 months. After reworking my diet to ensure I consumed enough fuel, “two-a-days” became second nature. I started 9Round on March 25, 2019 and accomplished my 100th workout on June 14, 2019, one week earlier than the original goal.

Seeing Results

A year later, I have completed 438 workouts, increased my strength and cultivated real friendships. I push myself to achieve my physical best and try everything they challenge me with, especially when I doubt myself. I focus on 3-minute increments and strive to max out my effort during those last 30 seconds. I set physical, accomplishable goals and compete only with myself. If you choose to try a 9Round, tell them TKO Tasha from Dunedin encouraged you.

The best advice I can offer is to find something that energizes and excites you to move. Finding the joy in the process will propel you toward your desired outcome.

Making Adjustments During COVID-19

Gym closures and social distancing are an impediment in this time of COVID19. To adjust, I purchased a heavy bag so that I can continue my commitment to improving myself at home.

Motivation is an internal force. External influences can encourage and inspire motivation, however, conviction to devote yourself and your time to your goal will change everything. Start with a small goal, accomplish it and build from there.

The human body is amazing. We are all capable of far more than we credit ourselves for. Belief in yourself is the foundation for achieving anything. Believe that you can accomplish this and you will.
Employees from various Appointing Authorities ran the 3rd Annual Armed Forces Families Foundation Skyway 10K on Sunday, March 1, 2020.

**Bryan Peterson** (Customer Service Technician, Tax Collector’s Office) crossed the landmark bridge for the 3rd time along with his mom.

Bryan Peterson and his mom Sharon, after the race.

**Jimmy Jones** (Senior Project Manager, Tax Collector’s Office) will remember this day as an opportunity to be grateful, eliminating negativity, and reaching goals.

Jimmy Jones after the race.

**Donna Verrett** (Lead Tax Technician, Tax Collector’s Office) and her husband were first-time runners.

Donna Verrett (on left), crossing the finish line.

Employees Participate in the Armed Forces Families Foundation Skyway 10K

**Jamie Walseth** (Administrative Assistant, Tax Collector’s Office) crossed the bridge with her husband for the 1st time. Jamie continues her amazing personal journey.

Joe Walseth, Jamie Walseth, Bryan Peterson, Sharon Peterson after the race.

**Jimmy Jones** (Senior Project Manager, Tax Collector’s Office) will remember this day as an opportunity to be grateful, eliminating negativity, and reaching goals.

Jimmy Jones after the race.

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Donna Verrett (on left), crossing the finish line.

**Bruce Bussey** (Community Development), Jennifer Wright, Lisa Freeman, Christine Colabella, Dale Williams kneeling (all in Human Services)

More photos on the next page.
Have something wellness-related you’ve done that you want to brag about? Email photos to wellness@pinellascounty.org and the name and date of the race, walk, etc. We’ll give you a well-deserved “High Five!”

Tobacco Users - DEADLINE EXTENSION TO APRIL 30, 2020

If you attested “yes” to tobacco use during Annual Enrollment, you must complete an approved tobacco cessation program to qualify for the 2020 tobacco premium waiver. Due to the current public health crisis, the tobacco cessation program deadline has been extended from March 31 to April 30, 2020.

- Employees may complete the requirement through telephone coaching or the online program.
- If you do not complete the cessation program before the original deadline of March 31st, you will see payroll deductions beginning in April that will be reversed if the program is completed by April 30.

Visit www.pinellascounty.org/hr/tobacco for more information on how you can satisfy this requirement.

Go to www.wellnesscoachingnow.com to register for the free UnitedHealthcare/Optum online program.