

# During COVID-19, Take Simple Steps to Establish a New Normal



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It's always the right time to commit to healthy habits, behaviors and steps to improve your physical and mental health. With the COVID-19 pandemic creating so much uncertainty and upending so many routines, experts say that focusing on the things within your control is particularly important.

"At this particular moment -- challenging as it may be -- it is very important for all of us as individuals to recognize that our actions can and do have a collective impact," says Dr. Patrice A. Harris, president of the American Medical Association (AMA). "A lot of people are grieving at this moment. Tragically some are grieving loss of loved ones; but people can also grieve the loss of employment, routines or the ability to be with family and friends. Everyone should know that these feelings are normal, and they should allow themselves to experience them."

Here are some simple steps from the AMA to maintain your physical and mental health during the unusual times of COVID-19:

1. Channel your feelings of anxiety or helplessness into action. Practicing physical distancing and making sure to wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds are two steps that protect your health and the health of others. Create a safety action plan for you and your family. Also consider how small gestures -- like offering to pick up groceries for an older or at-risk neighbor who may be anxious about leaving home -- can make a big

difference.

2. Take care of yourself physically. Get as much sleep as you can, try to include fruits and vegetables into your diet, and make sure you move. With many gyms and parks closed and physical distancing in place, it may seem harder to work out, so consider options at home, including dancing, to stay active.

3. Create new routines. With more people working from home and/or caring for school-aged children, the daily lives we had before COVID-19 are a distant memory. But building routines -- time for work, time for meals, time for decompressing -- is critical to creating a new normal. In the world today, there are so many things we can't control, but our schedules are something we can.

4. Take time to turn off social media and the news. It is critical at this moment to know what is happening in the world and to stay connected with family and friends, but if social media and 24-hour news are making you anxious, consume them in doses.

5. Feel your feelings. It's natural to worry and be afraid at a moment like this. It is also important to remember there are physicians, public health officials at all levels of government, as well as experts in the private sector, working tirelessly to limit the spread and impact of COVID-19.

6. Stay connected. Social media gives us a common connection point during times of isolation, but there is real opportunity at this moment to stay connected via phone calls and video chats with friends, family, and even people you haven't heard from in a while. Physical distancing is important, but it's still okay to socialize.

7. If you have children, talk to them in an age-appropriate way, and avoid ascribing feelings to them. Don't say, "I know you're scared." Kids are observant and they're wise. They may know things are different, but they may not be afraid. Let them know smart people are working on ways to keep us all safe. Model healthy coping. (StatePoint)

# Staying Healthy While Social Distancing

COVID-19 has the public rethinking how they stay healthy -- both physically and mentally. Even those in good health can start to feel anxious and fearful when the words 'pandemic' and 'social distancing' are mentioned.

But can you stay active and mentally healthy while social distancing? The answer is a resounding yes.

While routines have changed, it's critical that people keep exercising and eating nutritious meals, since the body is often able to better fight off illnesses when it's healthy and strong. Taking these steps helps fight off stress, which most people are experiencing right now in one way or another.

Here is some advice from Cigna chief nursing officer, Mary Picerno to help stay healthy, both physically and mentally, during this time.

• **Get Outside:** While it's important to limit physical interactions, getting outside for a run, walk or bicycle ride is a great way to boost endorphins and enjoy fresh air. Just make sure to maintain six feet between yourself and others. If weather or other reasons limit your ability to go outside, many companies and gyms are offering free online exercises right now. Endorphins have been found to reduce stress, increase feelings of happiness and help fight against depression.

• **Get Proper Nutrition:** Add fruits and vegetables to your plate for colorful, nutrient-rich meals. Vegetables also are a good source of fiber. Eating well will help you feel better and give you energy to keep moving. Now is a great time to try that new recipe or food subscription box!

• **Stay Hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water can help prevent dehydration. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, dehydration can cause unclear thinking and mood swings. Not sure how much to drink? Many medical professionals suggest following the 8x8 rule, eight ounces of water eight times a day.

• **Stay Connected:** Just because



you can't be with friends and family in person doesn't mean you can't stay in touch. Set up time to connect with video chats, phone calls and emails. Staying connected doesn't have to be high-tech. Have kids or just a kid at heart? Write encouraging messages on your driveway or in your windows for your neighbors, and postal and delivery workers.

• **Know Your Options:** One of the best ways to prepare is knowing what to do if you start to show symptoms. Cigna and many other health insurers are now waiving the costs of doctor visits related to a COVID-19 diagnosis as well as the cost of COVID-19 FDA-approved testing. To minimize your exposure, call or email your doctor or a local health system about a telehealth visit to be screened for COVID-19. The provider will then identify what steps you should take next.

• **Get Support:** Talking through concerns and fears can help put them in perspective and make you feel calmer. You may want to reach out for professional support if you're struggling. Cigna offers many resources and tools, including a 24-hour toll-free help line (1-855-287-8400) to speak with qualified behavior health clinicians, a webinar focused on managing anxiety, fears and concerns, and mindfulness podcasts (available in English and Spanish) focused on improving resiliency and stress management.

During this challenging time, taking care of your health should be a priority. (StatePoint)