

Self-Care During COVID-19 Pandemic

by Frank Haber

Acceptance

A difficult period of time like the one we experience right now requires a lot of sacrifice and adjustment from us. The first step towards mastering this challenge is accepting the current situation and the new rules and regulations as they are. By accepting this difficult transient time period as well as the negative feelings that come with it, we are able to calm down and gather our strength to work actively towards changing what can be changed in order to successfully cope and adapt. It is very important that we remain benevolent, kind and compassionate towards ourselves and that we accept that we may feel vulnerable due to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation. Being mad at the situation and looking for someone to blame may be as counterproductive as trying too hard not to be emotionally influenced at all by the pandemic.

Daily Structure

Despite the unusual situation, try to keep as much structure and rhythm in your everyday life as possible. Of course, due to the loss of some normal daily routines, we may experience voids in our schedules. However, those may also offer the opportunity to experiment with and establish new routines and practices. If a certain rhythm is not imposed on us anymore, it is up to us create a new one that feels good and provides us with a sense of stability and certainty. It can be helpful to determine a good time to get up (even if there may not be a direct need). Ask yourself what could be a good ritual for the start of the day. For many people, the three main meals breakfast lunch and dinner offer natural anchors that create predictable periods in the morning and afternoon. Here is an example of a healthy daily routine:

1. Get up and go to bed at a regular time.
2. Take a shower. Get dressed. Do your hair. Eat breakfast. Exercise.
3. Participate in online lectures and do your homework assignments and exam preparations.
4. Stay connected with your family and friends. Have a video chat with at least 1-2 people daily.
5. Schedule some time for a hobby and the things you enjoy. Do read, play music, do puzzles etc.
6. Set up a 'worrying time'. Allow yourself to write down all worries and give yourself permission to think about them during a special time of day.
7. Engage in well-being practices. Use meditation and mindfulness apps. Keep a gratitude journal by writing down three things you are grateful for every day. Remember a lot of things has been not cancelled like music, reading, singing, laughing and hope.

Information Management

The constant flow of information and news about infection numbers, reactions, regulations and the economic effects of the pandemic can serve on the one hand your need for orientation. On the other hand, the constant confrontation with bad news can also be a burden and lead to negative feelings and pronounced brooding. Here it is advisable not to constantly expose yourself to this flood of information but to visit news portals only at certain times limit your smartphone use and temporarily deactivate notifications. If you wanted to find out more about the developments use trustworthy sources only such as local health authorities or the official announcements by the university.

Dealing with Negative Emotions

The exposure to unsettling information, the enormous uncertainty regarding the overall situation and the massive restrictions in public and business life can lead to stress, worries and negative emotions such as anxiety and depressiveness. Remember your emotional responses are absolutely understandable and natural. Many people will feel very similar during these challenging times. However, as much as it is important to accept your difficult emotions during the pandemic, your daily experience should not be overshadowed by them. Interrupt negative thoughts consciously, detach from them by viewing them as transient occurrences and try to refocus your attention onto positive experiences such as pleasant memories and positive future plans. Engage in mindfulness and relaxation exercises for which you will find corresponding instructions on many websites and apps. Last but not least, do not hesitate to approach our Psychological Counseling Services whenever you feel like talking to a mental health professional about your emotional wellbeing concerns.

Interpersonal Contact

Social contact is an important psychological resource and provider of emotional balance in everyday life. Interpersonal contact can reduce stress, increase sense of worthiness and security and offer the opportunity to talk about personal experiences. The current measures to restrict social contacts run counter to basic human needs and can lead to feelings of loneliness, abandonment and isolation. However, even though it's important to accept these emotions, it is worthwhile to consider and consciously make use of alternative channels of communication such as writing letters and postcards, making extensive phone calls or meeting with friends and family on video-conferencing platforms such as Skype or Zoom. Even though face-to-face encounters are considered more personal and authentic, an intense exchange via digital communication channels can also make you feel less isolated and more connected.

Text inspired by Dr. Frank-Hagen Hofmann, Head of the Psychological Counselling Service at Studierendenwerk Heidelberg.