Working Remotely During COVID-19:
Your Mental Health & Well-Being

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is presenting new and unique major challenges. We are navigating unchartered waters with this virus making it important to find new ways to work and interact while also taking care of our mental health and well-being.

Many are teleworking full-time for the first time, isolated from co-workers, friends and family. Our daily living routines are disrupted causing added anxiety, stress and strain physically, mentally, and financially. It is completely natural for this disruption and uncertainty to lead to anxiety and stress. Now more than ever, we all must take care of our mental health and well-being. As we protect ourselves against potential exposure to the Coronavirus, keep in mind that social distancing does not mean social isolation. This resource provides practical tips on taking care of our mental health and well-being.

How do I maintain my health & wellness?

▶ **Keep a regular schedule:** Create and maintain a routine and schedule. Set up a designated space for you and each family member to work and learn. Don't forget to include periodic breaks for recharging in your schedule. Although everyone's schedule will be different, here is a sample:

Time	Activity
7:00am	Wake up, stretch (take care of kids/animals)
7:30am	Breakfast and family time (technology free!)
8:30am-12:00pm	Work and check on updates with small breaks every 30 minutes or so
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch break, get fresh air, stretch & exercise
1:00pm – 5:00pm	Work with breaks every 30 minutes, check in with co-workers
5:00pm – 7:00pm	Dinner and screen break! Call a friend, family, or loved one
7:00pm – 9:00pm	Self-care time

▶ **Stay connected:** Stay connected with family, friends, and support systems using technology like facetime, skype, google hangout and other video-based options. Talk about your fears and concerns with people you trust. Chances are they are feeling the same way.

▶ **Keep your immune system strong:** Make a commitment to staying strong by:

» Washing your hands with soap for 20 seconds (or 2 happy birthdays!)

» Getting enough sleep

» Eating well and staying hydrated

» Taking vitamins

▶ **Prioritize personal hygiene & limit contact with others:** This is imperative to avoid spreading the virus. Here's what should be done:

» Again, worth repeating, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer regularly.

» Use a tissue to cover your sneeze or cough, or when unavailable, cough or sneeze into your elbow.

» Disinfect with anti-bacterial wipes areas and objects that are heavily trafficked or are touched regularly where you live and work.

» Avoid contact with those who are sick and avoid touching your face - eyes, nose, and mouth.

» Stay home when you are sick.

▶ **Exercise & stay active:** This is not only good for your physical health, but your mental health too. Periodically, get up and move around your home. Walking, stretching, planks or jumping jacks, whatever works best for you to reduce or alleviate stress and increase endorphins. While our favorite gyms and fitness centers are closed during this time, many are offering free livestreams or app-based workouts for members and the general public, so check online to see what's available.

▶ **Get fresh air:** If circumstances allow, go outside for a brisk walk and fresh air, but avoid crowds and close contact with others.

▶ **Stay informed:** Knowledge is power and it's good to stay updated on progress being made in combatting the virus. Stay informed on the latest updates from reliable sources like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

▶ **Limit media consumption:** Avoid continuous exposure to news, media, and social media that may trigger or elevate anxiety, stress or panic. Stay informed but limit media consumption.

▶ **Set boundaries on work schedule:** When working from home, be sure that you are working reasonable hours. It can be tempting to work more while you have your work at home, however it can also be taxing on your health and well-being, so stick to a schedule with healthy boundaries.

▶ **Distract & redirect:** Engage in activities that benefit your well-being, bring you joy and distract you from existing challenges. This might include meditation and yoga, often offered free online. You may also enjoy journaling, reading, art projects, cooking with new recipes, breathing exercises, or listening to a calming podcast or music.

▶ **Get creative:** share tips with co-workers and friends on what's working well for you and encourage them to do the same. Come up with new ideas like planning a google hangout at a mutually agreed upon time to exercise together – like 1-minute planks, 10 jumping jacks, whatever you decide, but keep it simple. Share photos of pets on how they are enjoying the new routine. The sky's the limit on creative ways to stay connected.

How do I manage my mental health condition during this challenging time?

The information included above applies to everyone whether you experience a mental health condition or not. Here are additional tips for those diagnosed with mental health conditions:

▶ **Continue treatment & medication:**

» Despite changes in routine, it is extremely important to follow your treatment plan.

» If your symptoms change or you need reassurance during this difficult time, call your treating provider's office to see if they are offering virtual visits. Tele-mental health visits are growing and an important way to connect with care.

» Be sure that medication refills are up to date. If you are concerned about running low, request that your treating health care provider approves a 60-or -90-day supply of medication.

» Cold and flu medications may interact with antidepressants and/or antipsychotics so consult with your health care provider or pharmacist if you are using over the counter medications.

▶ **Responding to symptoms of COVID-19:** If you are feeling symptoms that may be associated with the COVID-19 virus, call your primary care provider first to talk about next steps in care. This virus continues to strain hospital resources so it's best to get directions from your primary care provider on what to do rather than going to an emergency room.

▶ **Recognize warning signs & triggers:** Continue to monitor new or worsening symptoms you may be experiencing with either your mental health or overall health and well-being. Do your best to keep your stress level low and engage in activities, like those listed above, that help you manage your stress levels during this disruptive time.

▶ **Engage your support network:** Just as you would during other major life changes, stay connected with family and trusted friends and let them know if you need extra support during this challenging time. That might include regular phone calls, check-ins, and related support. Be clear about what you need during this time.

What can managers and HR professionals do to support employees?

With many organizations requiring employees to stay out of the office, it's more important than ever to encourage and facilitate regular communication with employees. Here are tips for managers and human resource professionals in supporting employees in staying connected to the workplace and each other:

▶ **Show empathy & be available:** Understand that employees are likely feeling overwhelmed and anxious about circumstances related to the virus. Make yourself available to your staff to talk about fears, to answer questions and to reassure them about work and other issues that might come up.

▶ **Stay connected with communication & meeting tools:** Use virtual meeting options with video, like Zoom and JoinMe, for regular check-ins and to allow teams to connect with one another "face-to-face."

▶ **Recognize the impact of isolation & loneliness:** Working remotely can cause people to feel isolated, making it more important to routinely check in with your team, not only about their work product, but also to see how they are doing. Loneliness can lead to depression and other mental health issues. Be aware of significant changes you may see in your team member's personality or work product, because it may be a sign that a person is struggling.

▶ **Encourage online training:** This is a great time to encourage employees to sharpen their skills with online training. It is also a good distraction to focus on learning rather than worrying about other issues. Find online trainings and new learning opportunities to recommend to employees.

▶ **Check in with your EAP & Health Plan:** Check in with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to confirm their availability and to coordinate support for employees. Remind the staff that the EAP is there if they need support and can connect employees with behavioral health support if it's needed. Also, connect with the organization's health plan(s) to learn what they are offering to support plan members and pass that information onto employees. Be sure to include all relevant weblinks and phone numbers for both the EAP and health plan in communicating with employees.

Links to Additional Helpful and Reliable Resources

CDC:

cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html

APA:

• psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2020/02/coronavirus-and-mental-health-taking-care-of-ourselves-during-infectious-disease-outbreaks

• psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/covid-19-coronavirus

WHO:

who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_8

SAMHSA:

samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf

NAMI:

nami.org/getattachment/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2020/COVID-19-and-Mental-Illness-NA-MI-Releases-Importan/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf?lang=en-US

SUPPORT & LIFELINES:

If you are experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety or depression, reach out for support.

» Crisis Text Line: **Text 741741**

» National Suicide Prevention
Lifeline: **1-800-273-8255**

For more resources on workplace mental health,
visit the Center's website: **workplacementalhealth.org.**