
Thrive

Boosting our wellbeing during uncertain times

by GAYNOR PARKIN

2020 is throwing out many challenges, not least the current COVID-19 situation with all the uncertainty this is creating and the potential impact on our physical, mental and financial wellbeing.

While there is no magic formula – do x and y and everyone will be fine – there are some tricks to coping well during uncertain times. Scientific studies of resilience have shown that it is possible to emerge stronger, happier and even “thriving” following difficult experiences.

HERE'S OUR PICK OF THE BEST STRATEGIES:

Stay connected. Talk with and spend quality time with the people who are most important to you. Ask for their help and let them help you in whichever ways feel more useful. When it's not possible to connect in person, try out different technologies to feel close remotely – if you are unsure how, ask a young person or your IT department at work to help set you up. Where possible, try to maintain a social routine, such as hosting virtual coffee breaks with your colleagues over video-conference, or watching TV with a friend over Skype.

Prioritise your health. Eat nutrient-dense food, keep active and exercising (this may need to be outdoors to follow social distancing guidelines), reduce alcohol and caffeine (your body doesn't need more to do), and get good quality, restorative sleep.

Plan pleasurable experiences to look forward to. This is an important one as positive emotions recharge us physically, mentally and emotionally. In a time when many social events and travel plans are being cancelled, it's okay to feel upset about missed opportunities. Instead, try to increase the number of small pleasurable events that will give you moments of joy, contentment and satisfaction, as well as scheduling activities ahead that you can really look forward to. Ask friends or family to help you plan if it feels too hard at the moment. Consider purchasing a gift voucher for your favourite restaurant, movie theatre, or yoga studio – this will give you something to look forward to, while also supporting local businesses that may be struggling right now.

Try out different ways of making life feel more meaningful. This may seem odd advice in all the uncertainty, but it works. What would help give you a sense of purpose and meaning in life right now? Doing something creative or tackling a project, trying out something new that is challenging for you? Perhaps considering how you can help other people, or support some form of community activity (which may need to be online at the moment)? If you are in a place to help others, consider reaching out to any vulnerable or self-isolating neighbours by offering to buy their groceries, fill their prescriptions, or complete other tasks that they can't do themselves. We are stronger when we band together as a community.



Hold the big picture or focus down. Looking ahead to a time in the future, or reminding yourself you will eventually look back on this hard time, can be helpful. Conversely, focusing on a day at a time, or a few hours at a time, is a good strategy if the big picture feels overwhelming.

Seek help. Sometimes our usual support network isn't enough. Professional help via your work EAP is often available or talk with your GP about other resources.

Choose what you read and listen to. We also strongly recommend being careful about information overload at the moment. Definitely be choosy about which sites you look at, and limit how often you look and the amount of time you spend scrolling.

SOME GOOD ONES TO CONSIDER:

This page has some great mindfulness/anxiety resources that are specific to the current pandemic and is being regularly updated:

<https://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide>

This Washington Post piece has some good advice on staying connected while staying home:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/social-distancing-shouldnt-mean-losing-human-connection/2020/03/12/89fbb85c-63c0-11ea-acca-80c22bbee96f_story.html

This post from Adam Grant (Industrial Psychology Professor at Wharton) has some helpful advice about using emotion regulation strategies to help with "pandemic panic":

<https://twitter.com/AdamMGrant/status/1238818010670006277>

Also, check out this podcast with David DeSteno (Professor of Psychology at Northeastern University) on the science of fear and coronavirus (how and why fear can bias our decision-making in problematic ways):

<http://bigpicture-science.org/segment/david-desteno-calibrating-our-fear>