**COVID-19: Coping With the New Normal**

**Syed Imam, PhD**

**Clinical Psychologist, San Diego, CA**

The adverse condition of social isolation and loneliness amid this pandemic around the globe is causing people to live under constant fear, stress and anxiety which may lead to hypertension, sugar imbalance, dysfunctional metabolism, chronic medical condition, reduced immunity and other psycho-physical state of being in a vulnerable condition. Simply put, we can experience elevated blood pressure, sugar level, insomnia, restlessness, skin disease, depression, hopelessness, irritability, aggression, reduced stress tolerance and onset of other psycho-medical condition detrimental to our wellbeing and quality of life. The good news is that we may practice simple things to protect and prevent from the sickness simultaneously boosting our immune strength with some fresh tool to increase stress tolerance and resiliency.

By now, most of us are pretty well educated about the basic preventive measure such as handwashing, social distancing, sanitization, social group avoidance, cleaning etc. But, changing and adapting to small activities mentioned below and planning to adhere to them can make positive change.

1. **Sleep:** Good sleep rejuvenates our mind and body, boost our immune system, reduces anxiety/fatigue and improves our capacity to stay healthy and fit on daily basis. Practice good sleep hygiene and sleep your regular hours to satisfaction as you did prior to this crisis.
2. **Breathing Exercise:** Relax yourself; sit or lay down comfortably, close your eyes, listen to your breath while you breathe in and out, feel the bodily changes as you breathe. Diaphragmatic or belly breathing is better than the chest breathing. Inhale from your nose to the count of 5 seconds, hold it for 4 seconds and exhale to the count of 7 seconds. Repeat 5 cycle to feel the fresh oxygen in your system.
3. **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is as simple as being aware of yourself and your being in your surroundings. It can be any act of mind and body exercise that brings us back to consciousness and self-realization. Any religious prayer, meditation, devotional ritual, focused spiritual exercises accompanying meditation could be practiced as mindfulness exercise. It enhances our sympathetic nerve response by strengthening our brain pathways that strengthen our coping mechanism in case of adverse situation. Practice mindfulness 3-5 times a day.
4. **Physical Exercise:** Is vital for life; stretches, walking, gardening or other physical activities that suits your taste. Spend at least 30 - 60 minutes every day to nurture your strength and resiliency.
5. **Nutrition:** Balanced diet/food, natural supplements and vitamins improves health and immune system.
6. **Hydration:** Drink 3-4 liters of plain water at room temperature every day. Water is life and the best drink.
7. **Healthy Habits:** It costs nothing and keeps you strong. Stay away from drugs/ abusive substances and limit your caffeine. This is an opportune time to get rid of any addiction.
8. **Positive Relationship:** This is high time that we focus on building our positive relationship within and beyond our family system. Resolving conflicts by amicable means and appropriate discussion, exploring mutual strength and respect, building bridges of love, cohesion and bonding.
9. **Acceptance & Forgiveness:** Acceptance of others as they are and forgive others and or seeking forgiveness from others brings reservoir of positive space and energy into our mind. Cleaning up the clutters and debris from the societal bruise such as, grudge, hate, shame and guilt fills the mind with immense positive energy.
10. **Unconditional Love:** Love is potent and powerful, it has the power to melt the mountain. Love yourself, the nature, the creator, your family, your significant others and anything you could imagine. It changes the perspective on how we perceive self and others.
11. **Mental Health Care:** Media distancing is the key; limit your time up to 20 minutes a day to remain updated with the current news. Stay away from tracking mortality and infection spread on hourly basis. Find out the appropriate app, YouTube videos/programs per your taste that makes you feel better. Share your feelings and emotions with others and offer them the space where they can do the same; sharing is caring. Be kind to yourself; no crisis stays forever, the days are longer than the nights. Sun comes out every day to spread the sunshine, embrace it. Ask for and seek professional help, it is not worth suffering in isolation.
12. **Kindness:** An act of kindness a day, keep the sickness away. Make a plan to do at least one act of kindness each day, this could as simple as making a phone call to your friend, relatives, neighbors to check on them. Lend them your ear that they can whisper in. Be generous in providing them comfort, support and assurance, even verbal support goes a long way.
13. **Reading/Journaling/Hobbies:** Read the book(s) that you always wanted to but had no time. Reading keeps you up, engaged and fills your mind with wisdom and intellect. Journaling is very cathartic and healing; relieves one from trauma of the past and sooth your brain. Put down your thoughts and feelings, your daily experience on the piece of paper and feel the refreshing affect it has. Brush your skill and bring your nostalgia back; get involved in the activities and hobbies you loved in the past or continue to nurture the one that you do.

Last but not the least, set your routine and customize your day based upon the aforementioned tips, track your progress and make change as needed in consonance with your daily activities and responsibilities. Adhere to the discipline and schedule that you set, keep fine tuning it and enjoy. Start your day with smile and positive attitude, be grateful for what you have and be kind and compassionate to yourself, others and the world.

syedreply@yahoo.com

simam@upacsd.com