WellSpan® HEALTH

EMPLOYER SERVICES

Well At Work

Employee Guide:
Emotional & Mental Wellbeing

COVID-19





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Well at Work

WellSpan Employee Assistance Program

While we are seeing good news about the flattening of the curve related to the number of COVID-19 patients, it is important to remain vigilant in the coming months.

As a community, we will move through decisions and phases of resuming new day-to-day routines. This will require all of us to maintain a high level of safety to continue protecting ourselves and others.

In the following pages we share things we have learned as an organization that may be helpful as you return to work.

Taking Care of Yourself - *Common Reactions and Suggestions for Coping*

News reports and discussions with family and friends about Coronavirus (COVID-19) may bring about some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite *normal,* for individuals to experience waves of emotions during stressful events or uncertain times. Some of these "symptoms" may include:

- Uncertainty/fear
- Anxious/overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional outbursts
- Hyper alert to environment
- Restlessness/agitation
- Appetite changes
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- Nausea/stomach issues

These responses are very natural reactions to stressful times. Everyone is unique in their response because of personal history, beliefs, outlook, support system, health status and coping strategies.

Helpful suggestions for you to try

- Talk about what you are hearing & how it impacts you to people you trust when you are ready.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. This may sound silly, but we often forget to hydrate when we are stressed or feeling anxious. Dehydration can make those feelings worse.
- Eat well-balanced meals throughout the day.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Practice deep breathing exercises to calm yourself and try to relax. Check out apps like *Calm* or *Headspace*.
- Consider taking a break from watching the news or accessing social media sites to shield yourself from the constant barrage of information.
- Try to focus on what you can control like proper hand-hygiene, preparing emergency supplies, etc.
- It's natural to think about the "what if…, could of…, should of…" thoughts. However, these thoughts will not help you. Focus on positive outcomes and facts.
- To manage reoccurring, stressful thoughts, simply acknowledge the thought and try to imagine holding a remote control in your hand and changing the channel by shifting your focus on a joy-filled moment or peaceful place. You may also want to consider saying a repetitive, positive statement out loud.
- Incorporate self-care and joy into each day – read a book, play with your kids or pet, listen to your favorite music, or watch a funny movie.
- Try to maintain your daily routines and structure your time. You will likely find that maintaining your routine will help gain back a sense of control and order in your life.
- Engage in physical activity (exercise), alternated with relaxation. It will help to alleviate some of the anxious "energy" you may be feeling.
- Sometimes, when our thoughts become overwhelming, professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary; consider calling WellSpan EAP for further assistance.

Helpful suggestions for family and friends

- Listen carefully. When others talk about their experiences and feelings, their emotional load seems lighter to bear. One of the best ways you can help is to just listen. You don't have to come up with solutions or answers. It's okay if someone breaks down and cries.
- Spend time being "present"; presence is more important than words.
- Be understanding. Your perceptions and reactions to an incident may be very different from others based upon past experiences, beliefs, and coping skills. Recognize that everyone has their own unique response. Do not judge or impose your response or coping strategies on to others.
- Accept feelings. A wide range of emotions may be felt such as fear, anger, sadness and guilt. These emotions may be strong and change from moment to moment. If directed at you don't take them personally. Allow free expression without judgment or critique.
- Respect their need for balance in being together and personal time.
- If asked, be a buffer to extended family members and friends who may reach out to offer support. Having to retell the story over and over again about the traumatic event may be difficult and painful.
- Reassure them that they are safe. We often take this for granted. However, they may understandably feel very violated by what has happened and we should do everything we can to help support them.
- Be careful not to promote gossip or rumors. A lot of information is being shared, be sensitive and respectful to all parties. Don't make assumptions or "fill in the gaps" with information that may not be accurate. Direct questions to the appropriate parties.
- Respect differences. Everyone responds and copes differently to traumatic situations. Some will reach out, while others will be more private and introspective. Show respect by giving each person what they need. If you don't know, ask. Be careful not to impose your own coping strategies onto someone else.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality. If someone shares information, be courteous and do not repeat what is shared. The only time confidences should be broken is when someone is at risk of harming themselves or others. Provide a safe, secure area to ensure privacy.
- Ask to lend a helping hand. By nature, people will not ask for help or may not know what to ask for; take the lead and offer a helpful hand. Suggestions may be sharing their workload, taking a walk or going out to lunch. Even small things like cleaning, preparing meals, running errands and caring for family members can be a huge help.
- Be supportive and sensitive – Simple statements like "I care about you" and "I'm here for you" demonstrate care and concern. Remember, you may not know all the circumstances of the event, their past experiences or current situation. Multiple stressors may exist. Provide positive and encouraging words to give strength and hope.
- Reflect on the advice from author Henri Nouwen:
- "The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares".

Offering Support to Co-Workers:
"Communication Do's and Don'ts"

Below are simple suggestions to help guide your interactions with co-workers as you return back to work and/or day-to-day work routines. Remember, you have a vital role in helping each other feel confident and comfortable in returning to work. How you respond can make a difference with productivity and morale.

Recommended Do's

- **Respect differences** – Everyone responds and copes differently to change. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an immeasurable amount of change to our lives. Some will reach out, while others will be more private and introspective. Show respect by giving each person what they need. If you don't know, ask. Be careful not to impose your own opinions regarding the crisis on others.

- **Listen more, talk less** – Be available when a listening ear is needed. Allow individuals to tell their story over and over again. Retelling helps process events and changes in hopes of gaining understanding and reassurance.

- **Accept feelings** – A wide range of emotions may be felt such as fear, anger, sadness, and guilt. These emotions may be strong and change from moment to moment. If directed at you don't take them personally. Allow free expression without judgment or critique.

- **Respect privacy and confidentiality** – If someone shares information, be courteous and do not repeat what is shared. The only time confidences should be broken is when someone is at risk of harming themselves or others.

- **Ask to lend a helping hand** – By nature, people will not ask for help or may not know what to ask for; take the lead and offer a helpful hand. Suggestions may be sharing their workload, taking a walk or going out to lunch.

- **Be supportive and sensitive** – Simple statements like "I care about you" and "I'm here for you" demonstrate care and concern. Remember, you may not know all the circumstances surrounding their anxieties, their past experiences or current situation. Multiple stressors may exist. Provide positive and encouraging words to give strength and hope.

Communication Don'ts

- **Don't make promises** – In a desire to make things better, people may make promises like "it will get better" or "nothing bad will happen again". Although well meaning, these are promises that cannot be guaranteed. If you make statements like "I promise to be here for you"; follow through on what you say. If you don't mean it, don't say it.

- **Don't explain "why"** – Although it's natural to seek answers or look for explanation, sometimes circumstances are beyond our understanding or there may not be answers. Opinions will vary and offer little if any help. Saying "I don't understand" may be the best response.

- **Don't rush the process** – People recover from traumatic events at different times. The nature of the event, past experiences and one's coping mechanisms all impact recovery. Don't make statements like "you should be over this by now" or "get over it". The healing process is a journey and a time frame cannot be dictated.

- **Don't make assumptions** – Don't assume you know how someone feels or what they need. Ask them. If they don't know, provide options/choices. This triggers coping mechanisms and empowers them to make decisions.

- **Don't joke around** – Be cautious when joking around, gesturing, or making light of the serious situation. Although humor can be helpful, never use it at the expense of someone else. It may be interpreted as being insensitive.

- **Don't promote gossip** – During critical events and change, a lot of information is shared. Please be discreet, do not encourage or participate in gossip. Be sensitive and respectful to the parties involved. Don't make assumptions or "fill in the gaps" with information that may not be accurate. Direct questions to the appropriate parties.

- **Don't pressure** – Remember healing is unique to everyone; don't pressure them to talk, don't pressure them to make decisions, don't pressure them to move at a fast pace. This is their journey; it is their ride.

Daily Self-Care Tips and More

Dr. Mike Diller's Five Self-Care Videos. These videos are short reminders to take care of ourselves during this uncertain time. Feel free to share with your employees.
https://www.wellspan.org/coronavirus/maintaining-good-mental-health/

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Spend extra time playing with children. Children will rarely communicate how they are feeling but will often make a bid for attention and communication through play. Don't be surprised to see therapeutic themes of illness, doctor visits and isolation show up. Understand that play is cathartic and helpful for children—it is how they process their world and problem solve, and there's a lot they are seeing and experiencing in the now.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Give everyone the benefit of the doubt and a wide berth. A lot of cooped up time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It is important to move with grace through blowups, to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges or continue disagreements. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Feeling blah because you can't get out as much as you'd like? Try dressing for the social life you want, not the social life you have. Get showered and dressed in comfortable clothes, wash your face, brush your teeth. Take the time to do a bath or a facial. Put on some bright colors. It is amazing how our dress can impact our mood.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Engage in repetitive movements and left-right movements. Research has shown that repetitive movement (knitting, coloring, painting, clay sculpting, jump roping, etc.), especially left-right movement (running, drumming, skating, hopping) can be effective at self-soothing and maintaining self-regulation in moments of distress.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Don't be a superhero. Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance. We are doing too many things in this moment and working under fear and stress. This does not make a formula for excellence! Instead, give try accepting everything about yourself, your current situation and your life without question, blame or pushback. There is no roadmap, no precedent for this, and we are all truly doing the best we can in an impossible situation.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Reach out to others at least once daily for thirty minutes. Try FaceTime, Skype, phone calls or texting. Connect with other people to seek and provide support. Don't forget to do this for your children as well. Set up virtual playdates with friends daily via FaceTime, Facebook Messenger Kids, Zoom, etc.—your kids miss their friends, too!

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

A healthy diet is important to your overall well-being. If stress and time constraints are making it difficult for you to eat well, try to take some simple actions, like having a salad or green leafy vegetable each day. Keep healthy snacks on hand (think baby carrots, almonds and apples) to curb cravings. Don't overlook nuts, fruits and high fiber cereals. Aim for balance, look for variety and practice moderation.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Remember to move! Stand up and be active. Exercise in whatever way you can, even in small increments. Get outside and take a walk and get some fresh air. Exercise can relieve stress, increase your energy level, improve sleep and boost your overall mood. Set a daily alarm if you need to.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Take breaks, breathe, slow down with intention and set limits. We must remember to step away from our work. Take a time out even if it's for a minute or two. To slow down, and be present, will help slow what may seem like a chaotic, stressful experience.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Do you have kids who are home from school? Consider drawing up and posting a **daily schedule**, with times for learning, play, exercise, chores and other items. You can maintain a feeling of normalcy by establishing routines and schedules. (This works for adults, too!)

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Are you getting to sleep at a decent time most nights? **Getting adequate sleep** will help you with your mood and energy level the next day. Try to limit screen time and caffeine intake prior to bed to help you sleep better.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Incorporate **JOY** into your schedule. Play with your kids or a pet. Listen to music. Watch a funny movie. Look through old photos. Find one thing (or two, or three things) to be grateful for each day.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Being mindful and focusing on the things you can control will assist in developing more positive emotions and decreasing unhelpful emotions for yourself and others. Be present and in the moment. Avoid the "what if's." Psychologists call this catastrophizing or running worst-case scenarios in our heads. This behavior will only create more distress. Breathe.

Daily Taking Care of Yourself Tip:

Laugh! Watch a funny movie, YouTube video or anything that tickles your funny bone. A good, hearty laugh can relieve physical tension and stress for up to 45 minutes afterwards. And, laughter is an essential part of the coping equation during an emotionally charged time. Get those feel-good endorphins flowing!

Quick Tips: Self Care Suggestions

- Take a walk
- Establish a routine
- Stay hydrated
- Yoga
- Exercise
- Talk with someone you trust
- Schedule in “me” time
- Listen to music
- Journal
- Enjoy a hobby
- Read
- Take time to practice gratitude
- Limit media consumption
- Spend time outdoors
- Take time to rest
- Deep breathing
- Mediate

4-7-8 Breathing

The **4-7-8 breathing** technique, also known as “relaxing **breath**,” involves **breathing** in for 4 seconds, holding the **breath** for 7 seconds, and exhaling for 8 seconds. This **breathing** pattern aims to reduce anxiety.

5 Finger Breathing

Spread your hand and stretch your fingers out. Pretend the pointer finger of your other hand is a pencil and imagine you are going to trace around the outline of your hand and fingers. Place your pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb and breathe in as you slide up. Breathe out as you slide down. Breathe in as you slide up your second finger and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your fingers and you have taken five slow breaths.

Meditation

Research continues to support that meditation can be helpful in managing stress. More and more people are learning various meditation techniques as a way to cope with life's challenges. Simply put, meditation is the ability to "quiet the mind" from distractions, noise, and clutter. It is not to be used as a way of escape, but rather to promote a deeper appreciation and connection to yourself and others. It is an exercise to "relax your mind" and like any form of exercise, there are varying types.

Before beginning meditation, practice these simple steps:

- Select a quiet location, free of distractions and interruptions
- Set aside a specific amount of time and stick with it
- Sit comfortably and quietly
- If comfortable, close your eyes to concentrate
- Begin relaxing your body, starting with your head, down to your toes
- Breathe slowly and naturally, releasing tension with each breathe
- Don't critique how you're doing, keep encouraging yourself
- Think of a pleasant place or repeat a positive word
- Continue for as long as you can
- When finished, remain sitting for a few more moments
- Gently begin to move your body before standing up

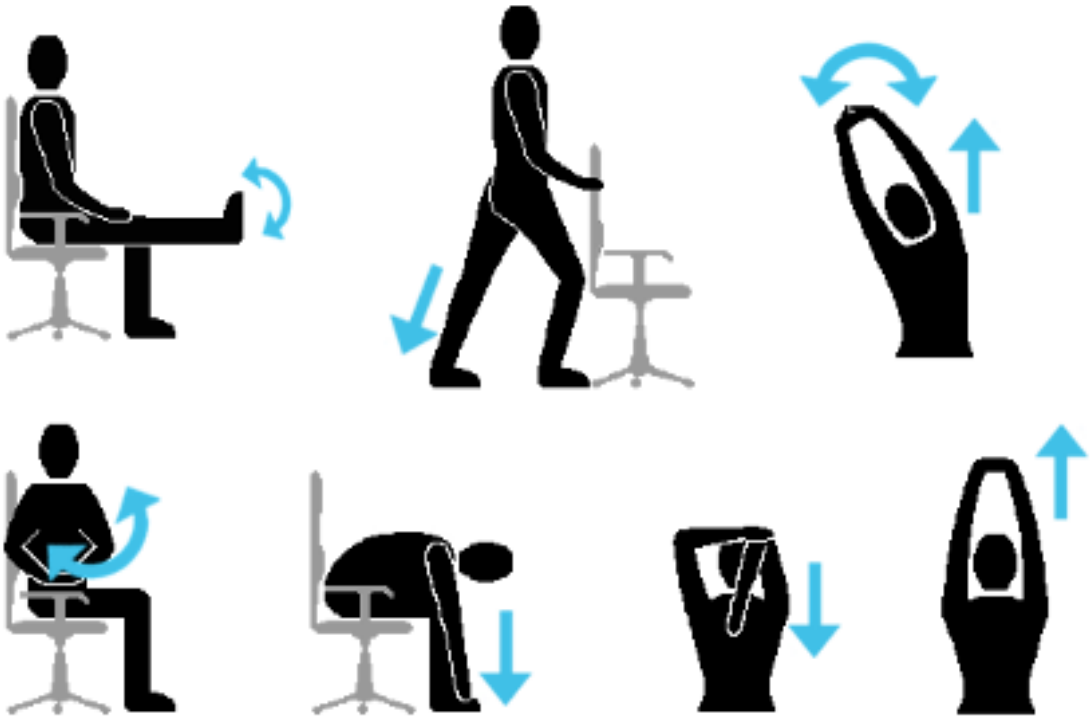
www.wellspan.org/relaxforsleep

www.wellspan.org/relaxformeditation

Stress and Stretching

Everyone encounters stress and stressful situations throughout their lives. For most, stress has become a daily part of their lives. It gives you headaches, sore shoulders, stiff necks and backaches as your body tenses as a reaction to stress. Learning how to handle the stress you face each day will help you to lead a happier, healthier, less stressful life. One of the many tools we can use to reduce stress in our lives is stretching exercises. When we stretch our bodies, we receive many benefits. These benefits include:

- Stress hormone production is decreased as receptors in the nervous system are stimulated
- The blood flow to the muscles is increased
- Muscles and joints that are tight and tense relax
- Joints experience a better range of motion
- Flexibility increases
- There is a reduction in feelings of stress, fatigue and anxiety
- Mental alertness increases
- Posture is improved relieving many aches and pains



Resources and Links

WellSpan EAP Teletherapy

WellSpan EAP has created a special category on our website, called **Teletherapy (which is typically done through a virtual video visit)**, on the Provider Search Tool located on the WellSpan EAP homepage: **www.WellSpan.org/EAP**

WellSpan Health

Daily updates to plans and procedures that are being put into place to ensure the health and safety of patients, visitors, staff and the community. **https://www.wellspan.org/**

2-1-1

Connects individuals to help when they are not sure where to turn. Support is available 24/7 to help individuals help access the best local resources and services to address their needs. Call 211 **http://211.org/#**

Suicide Prevention Hotline-1.800.273.8255

Provides free, confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources and best practices for professionals. **https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/**

Child Care Consultants

Supports families in finding and paying for quality childcare. **https://childcareconsultants.org/**

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The CDC provides guidance to keep people safe.
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2Findex.html

PA Department of Health

Promotes healthy behaviors, prevents injury and disease and assures the safe delivery of quality health care for all people in Pennsylvania
https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx

Mental Health Help During COVID-19

Crisis Text Line



Text 'PA' to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline



1-800-273-8255

Preventing suicide in PA



preventsuicidepa.org/

Disaster Distress Helpline



800-985-5990

Get Help Now for substance use disorder



1-800-662-4357

Veterans in crisis



veteranscrisisline.net

PA's support helpline



855-284-2494

Coping with COVID-19 stress



bit.ly/covid-coping

COVID-19 resources



mhanational.org/covid19