

# Strategies to Cope with COVID-19 Related Stress



*The Mecca of Black Wellness*



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We are all navigating through unprecedented times and changes due to the spread of COVID-19. These changes have impacted us in multiple ways including essential workers, working with heightened stress and anxiety and possibly fear, teleworking, loss of work, closed schools, and changes in how we interact and physically connect with others. In addition, many people either know someone who is recovering from COVID-19, or someone who passed due to complications from the virus. This pandemic has impacted all of us! Black Mental Wellness wanted to share with you some coping and wellness strategies and resources that we hope will help you cope with and get through these trying times.

## **General Strategies to Cope with COVID-19 Related Stress**

- Disconnect from social media and news outlets to decrease your COVID-19 related stress and anxiety
- Check reliable news sources and keep yourself informed of the facts
- Pause, take a break, meditate, and focus on things that are within your control in the present moment
- Rest!
- Practice healthy sleeping habits
- Wash your hands
- Stay home and practice recommended guidelines related to physical distancing
- Identify a schedule for you and your family (without overwhelming yourself) to help differentiate your weekday and weekend
- If you are an essential worker, identify supports, both within your job and at home, to help manage your increased stress
- If you have a skill that you've always wanted to learn, sign up for a new class or training online
- Identify activities that you enjoy and are still able to engage in and do them! Also, modify the things you love to do within the current safety guidelines. For example, attend church virtually or host a "night in" with friends via video chats. To make it really fun, even get dressed as if you were attending in person.
- Write in your journal
  - Write a list of things that are within your control
  - Practice positive affirmations
  - Write positive coping statements
  - Practice gratitude
- Monitor your feelings and responses to these current and ongoing stressors and communicate your needs to others. Seek mental health support if needed. Many mental health providers are still providing services through telemental health (video appointments).
  - Therapy for Black Girls (<https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>)
  - Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>)

## Maintain Social Connections

Social distancing does not equal social isolation. There are so many ways that you can remain socially connected while we have been advised to physically distance ourselves. Check out these strategies for staying socially connected and tag us @Blackmentalwellness with your approach to maintaining and sustaining social cohesion.

- Find new ways to connect to your family, friends and others.
- Volunteer to help others in your community
- Host a virtual hangout
- Host an online movie night or watch party
- Call family or friends
- Attend a virtual workout with your family or friends
- Attend a live concert or party on Instagram such as Club Quarantine on Instagram (@DNice). Many of your favorite artists also have and/or continue to provide a live music session/concert such as Anthony Hamilton's (@AnthonyHamiltonOfficial) weekly Sunday concert.

## Tap into Your Creativity

- Work on those DIY projects that have been on your to do list and you just haven't found the time
- Write (journal, songs, poetry, book, movie, etc.) whatever it is that allows your creativity to shine
- Create art, paint, and/or draw
- Sew
- Redesign a room in your home

## Relaxation Strategies

### Calming Breaths

Did you know that when you're experiencing significant emotional/physical stress or tension that it can also have an impact on your breathing? During times of stress, individuals are more likely to take short and quicker shallow breaths, compared to slow and longer deeper breaths when in a more relaxed state. Here are 2 strategies that you may find helpful in calming down your breaths and being in the present moment.

### Calm Breathing Strategy

1. Find a quiet place to sit
2. Take a few minutes to sit comfortably in a chair in an upright position, and allow your feet to firmly touch the ground, with your hands in your lap
3. Inhale: Take a deep breath in while counting to 3
4. Hold: Hold the breath in for 4 seconds
5. Exhale: Let out a deep slow breath through your mouth, counting to 5
6. Repeat: The cycle 4 times

### Grounding Exercise

- Identify 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell, and
- 1 emotion you can feel

# Spirituality

People often report that engaging in spiritual or religious activities helps them cope with adverse circumstances, relieve stress, and provides a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Enhancing your spiritual or religious practice can improve your mood, your outlook on life, and give you a sense of inner strength.

Tuning in to your spiritual and religious needs can also help you identify what is most important to you, focus on the things in life that are most meaningful, and engage in practices that will help you grow. Many often find that it becomes easier to make decisions in their lives when they have a spiritual or religious base to help guide them as they make choices in their lives that are in alignment with their personal beliefs.

- Pray or create a prayer journal
- Meditate
- Sing or listen to uplifting songs
- Read devotionals or something that speaks to your spirit
- Fast from something that will challenge you
- Connect with others that have a similar belief system
- Take a nature walk
- Attend a virtual religious service. Many churches are offering Sunday church service, Bible Study, and other religious ceremonies remotely. This is also a great way to remain connected to your church family
- Create a personal space that is free from negative energy

# Exercise and Nutrition

People who exercise also tend to report improved sleep and a greater ability to cope with stress (Weir, 2011).

## 5 Tips to Help you Stick to your Physical Activity Goals

1. Identify your why – What is your motivation for increasing your physical activity? Identify your reasons for wanting to become more active and keep those in mind when you find it hard to start moving.
2. Be patient with yourself – Our bodies did not get in their current state overnight, and the change that you desire won't happen overnight either. Remember to take one day at a time. If you miss a day of exercise or only walk two days instead of five, don't get frustrated. Just set a new goal for the rest of the week.
3. Set a regular time to exercise and stick to it. Make sure you have a backup plan in case your initial plan does not work out.
4. Use a fitness app or activity tracker to help you set goals, track your progress, and give you a nudge to get moving. Set small realistic goals for each week.
5. Find an accountability partner or an exercise buddy to help encourage, support, and motivate you to keep moving!

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, many gyms are currently offering free online services (virtual membership, live workouts, access to workouts, etc.).

Here are two online resources to get you started:

- <https://www.fastcompany.com/90481514/these-free-online-exercise-offers-will-help-keep-you-fit-and-sane-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>.
- <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-life-online-home-virtual-workouts-coronavirus-tt-0318-20200320-331wwhwqavatzl3bz7jit7yozy-story.html>.

## Nutrition

Nutritionists suggest that healthy eating habits have many benefits for our mental health and well-being that includes increased energy and improved mood. Please review some tips for healthy eating below.

1. Prepare your meals in advance. We are more likely to eat healthier meals and snacks when we prepare our daily meals in advance. When we are unprepared our chances of eating unhealthy meals, snacks, and fast food increase.
2. Drink lots of water. It is recommended that we drink 6-8 glasses of water a day. Water has a number of mental health benefits, including increased energy and brain functioning. If you find it difficult to drink water try adding fruit to your water. Lemon not only adds taste to your water but has many health benefits that include weight loss, clearer skin, and improved digestive health.
3. Eat moderate proportions. Each food group has a daily recommended number of servings. However, we have a tendency to eat more than the recommended number, which can cause fatigue, bloating, and weight gain. When preparing your meals, reduce overeating by preparing only the recommended serving size.
4. Eat slower. Eating slowly has many benefits, including weight loss, improved digestive health, and greater satisfaction with meals.
5. Eat more fruits and vegetables. Raw fruits and vegetables are found to reduce depression and improve psychological well-being. If you are experiencing difficulty eating fruits and vegetables daily, replace unhealthy snacks with fruits and veggies, add fruit to your morning breakfast (i.e., cereal, yogurt, oatmeal), drink smoothies with fruit and vegetables, and attempt to eat only fruits and vegetables once a week (e.g., Meatless Mondays).

## Mental Health Apps

Mental health apps that can be useful in providing additional mental health support, coping skills, and resources. We recommend the use of mental health apps as one tool for improving your mental well-being. This guide provides a list of mental health apps to begin building your toolkit of mental health resources.

- Calm
- Headspace
- Insight Timer
- Liberate

## Resources

### Employment

With layoffs and unemployment rates rising by the day, many Americans are trying to figure out what their future looks like. If you are in need of employment, here is a list of companies currently hiring.

[https://travelnoire.com/companies-hiring-thousands-new-employees/?utm\\_source=Travel](https://travelnoire.com/companies-hiring-thousands-new-employees/?utm_source=Travel).

### Education

Many education companies are providing free subscriptions for students during this time of school closures. Check out this list (<http://www.amazingeducationalresources.com/>) to find educational resources that can enhance your child's daily routine.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.BlackMentalWellness.com](http://www.BlackMentalWellness.com)



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For more information on COVID-19, and to receive the most up to date guidance on how to protect yourself and what to do if you feel sick, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

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