Self-Care in the Age of COVID-19: How to Manage Stress and Anxiety in Uncertain Times
Webinar Process

• If you have any questions during the presentation, please click on the Q&A control on your screen and post your question.

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• The webinar is being recorded.
Self-Care in the age of COVID-19: How to Manage Stress and Anxiety in Uncertain Times

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Disclosures

• I have no financial disclosures
Objectives

1. Identify challenges of life with COVID-19
2. Normalize your experiences!
3. Detect symptoms of stress and burnout
4. Determine coping strategies that work for you
5. Access additional resources
Challenges of COVID-19

- Uncertainty
- Constantly changing guidelines and restrictions
- Social distancing/isolation → loneliness
- Fear of contracting virus
- Fear of infecting others
- Fear of the unknown
- Constant bombardment of news media
- Limited resources
Why am I so Overwhelmed??

• Wash your hands, shoes, feet, wheelchair wheels and rims, wipe down all surfaces, mail, groceries, car, cell phone, remote control
• Make sure you have enough food, toilet paper, medication on hand – but can you even find it?
• Drink more water
• Work and live at home
• Don’t go anywhere
• Cook all of your own food
• Financial insecurity
It Really is Overwhelming!

Inundated with news and conversation about COVID

Are our home health aides safe?

Are we becoming OCD germaphobes?

Medical family members living elsewhere to keep us safe

Will there be a second wave?

Hospitals are scary so you delay care
Problems With Social Distancing

- Isolated from social support network
- Decreased medical appointments means lack of community at VA, hospital
- No visitor policy at hospital
- Not seeing children/grandchildren, friends
- “zoom fatigue”
- No physical contact – no hugs!
- Feelings of loneliness
Additional Challenges for Persons with SCI/D

SCI places you at a greater risk for COVID-19 because the way your body responds to viruses is not as strong.

Complications of SCI or other health conditions make this problem greater.

| Diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease | Using catheters increases risk of infection | Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) | Pressure ulcers | Respiratory problems with lungs, diaphragm |
Safety of caregivers coming into the home

Burnout of caregivers in the home

How do we determine what is and isn’t safe for us now and with states re-opening?
Mental Health Symptoms

• Old psychological issues can be triggered or worsened
• New psychological issues can begin

• Monitor yourself for:
  • Anxiety
  • Depression
  • Suicidal thoughts
  • Increased drug or alcohol use
  • Changes to sleep or appetite
  • Increased prior mental health symptoms
Caregiver Burnout

• Signs
  • Emotional and physical exhaustion
  • Depression, anxiety
  • Loss of interest in activities
  • Changes to sleeping and eating habits (too much or too little)
  • Irritable, short-tempered
  • Physical symptoms – headaches, body aches, stomach aches
  • Trouble concentration/attention
  • Feeling ashamed of these symptoms
Decision Fatigue

• Previously straight-forward choices now require decision making
  • When to grocery shop
  • Can I see friends/family
• There are no clear answers and consequences may be significant
• Making repeated and difficult decisions leads to exhaustion

• Therefore, all decisions take up more energy, which makes it more difficult to make decisions!
PHEW!

How do we cope with all of this!?!?
• First, acknowledge the craziness of this situation!

• Normalize your experience with others

• Recognize this is a marathon, not a sprint

• Assess the resources and coping strategies you used before – what can you use now? Is it “good enough” even if it’s different?
Create Positives of this Wild Time

- Reconnect with family
- Take a break and stay at home
- Save money
- Rekindle old hobbies (i.e. start sewing again to make masks!)
- Remember what matters most
- Communities are working together
Adapting and Coping in New Ways

Food delivery vs. cooking at home

No sports? Watch replays of famous sports games

Online religious services

Plan ahead for meals, medication refills

Discover just how much food you actually have in your home and how long you can go without the grocery store

Find all that unused soap, lotion, hand sanitizer you’ve gotten as gifts or at health fairs (and never used)
Adapting and Coping in New Ways

- Build a new routine
  - Shop on certain days/hours
  - Keep hand sanitizer in car/purse/bag
  - Put masks by the door (and put a sign at the door to remind you to put the darn thing on!)
- Maintain structure/schedule daily, especially to do exercises!
- Explore free coursework online
- Explore free audiobooks or e-books from your local library
- Watch virtual concerts
- Watch tours of museums or our National Parks
- Practice Self-Kindness
Adapting and Coping in New Ways

- Prioritize your health
  - Sleep, exercise, eat well, stay hydrated
  - Don’t gain the “COVID 19”

- Mindfulness, meditation

- Limit news – TV, internet, newspaper

- Find things to talk about besides COVID

- Psychotherapy through telehealth
Concerns about States Reopening?

- What changes or behaviors feel okay for us?
- Proceed slowly – wait and see
- Take advantage of grocery store hours for seniors and persons with disabilities
- Select one person to do the shopping
- Patronize stores that prioritize safety, cleanliness, use of masks
- Limit frequency and time spent out of the home
Resources

- [www.christopherreeve.org](http://www.christopherreeve.org)
  - Click “Get Support” tab at home page for peer mentoring, general support
  - Type COVID into search box

- [www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org) -- Coronavirus Resources on home page

- VA Caregiver Support Program (855) 260-3274 8a-8p EST M-F
  - [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)

- Crisis Hotline (800) 273-8255

- [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSjsczmvSsupo_oT0-7pyzHWdvLvv756-](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSjsczmvSsupo_oT0-7pyzHWdvLvv756-)
Paralyzed Veterans of America Resources

• Emergency Relief Program -- home care, food, financial assistance, access to health care, wellness efforts, telephone check-ins

• VA apps – for everyone!
  • COVID coach
  • Mindfulness Coach
  • Mood Coach
  • Moving Forward
  • PTSD Coach
  • PTSD Family Coach
Thank you for attending!