

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



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**



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?

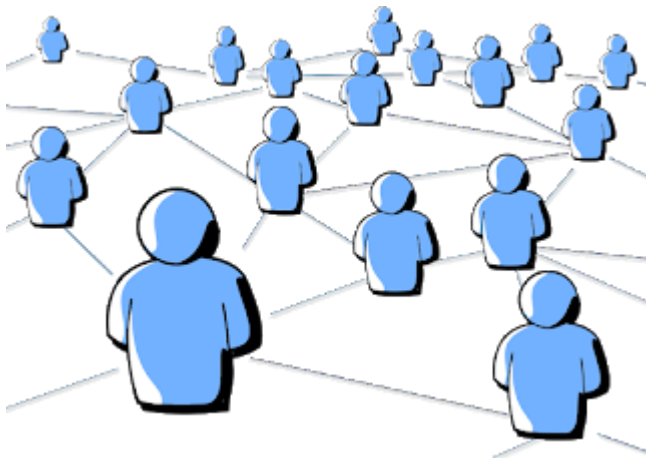
Are we becoming OCD germaphobes?

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

Additional Challenges for Persons with SCI/D

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?

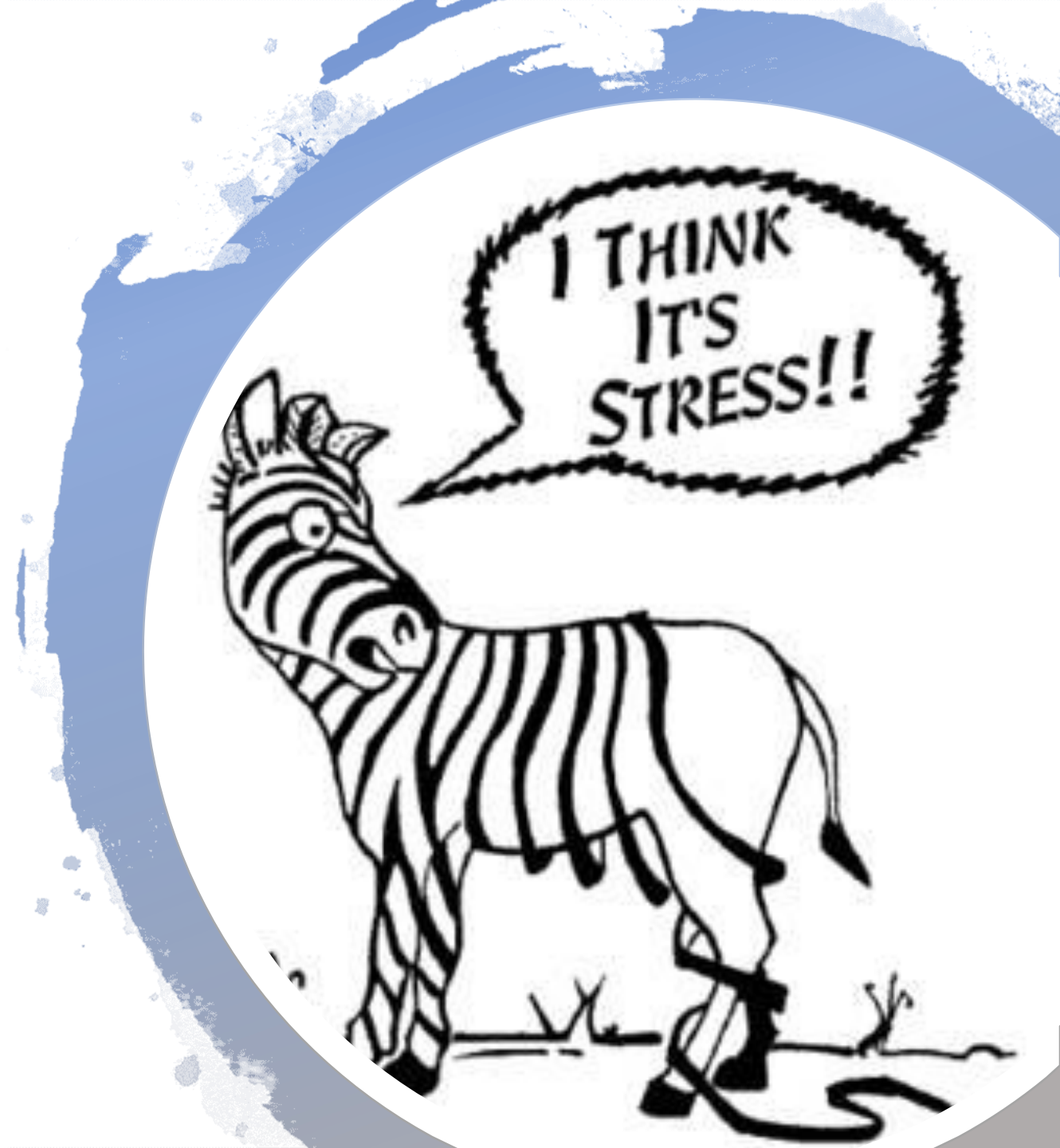
Mental Health Symptoms

- 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!?!?

How to Start

- 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!)

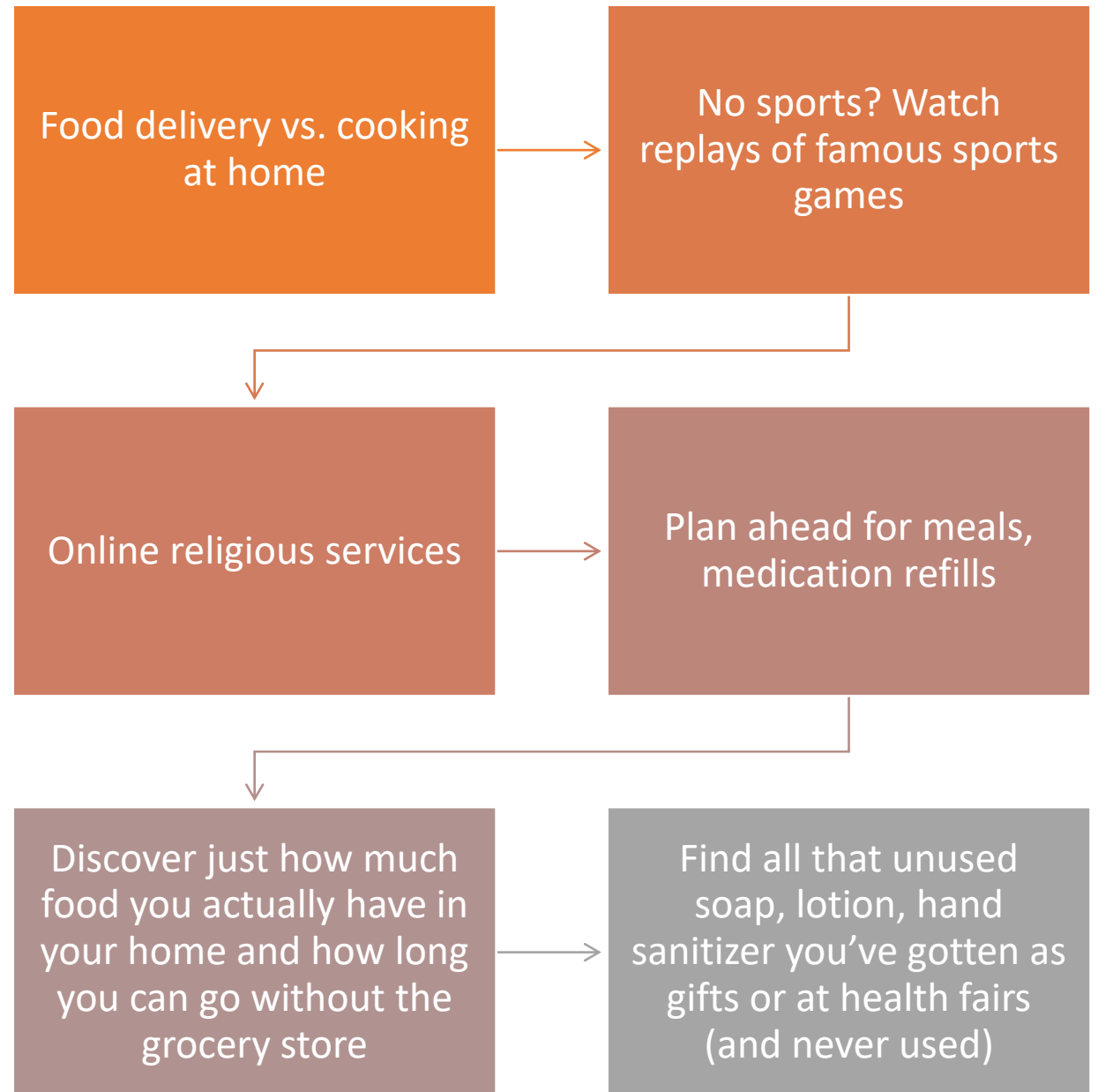


Remember what matters most



Communities are working together

Adapting and Coping in New Ways



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
 - Click “Get Support” tab at home page for peer mentoring, general support
 - Type COVID into search box
- www.pva.org -- Coronavirus Resources on home page
- VA Caregiver Support Program (855) 260-3274 8a-8p EST M-F
 - www.caregiver.va.gov
- Crisis Hotline (800) 273-8255
- 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!



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