

STRESS MANAGEMENT & COVID-19

Tensions are high right now on a global scale. As Covid-19 has reached a pandemic level, the global anxiety level is rising. Emotional reactions may involve worries about your health or the health of your loved ones, feeling unhappy and irritable, having difficulty sleeping, having trouble concentrating, headaches or chest pain, and feeling less motivated.

In times like these, it is useful to take a moment to reflect on how you are taking care of yourself and your loved ones. Here's a few strategies that might help.

TAKE MEDIA BREAKS: Block at least a few hours each day where you refrain from news outlets and social media use. While we are fortunate to have the technology to allow us to connect with family and remain in touch with world events while we are deployed, we also need to put down the screen every so often to stay healthy. Unplug and do something rewarding, relaxing, or enjoyable.

TRY BOX BREATHING: Borrow this technique used by Navy SEALs and performance athletes to calm your body and mind. Breathe slowly through your nose 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out slowly through your mouth 4 seconds, and then hold for 4 seconds. Repeat at least 3 times until you feel yourself relaxing. This can also be useful if you're having trouble sleeping.

MIND YOUR THOUGHTS: Strong emotions distort our thinking. Is there a chance we are falling into thinking traps, such as predicting the worst, emotional reasoning, or jumping to conclusions? Evaluate what the evidence is for and against a particular thought rather than accepting it as fact. Pay attention to whether your style of thinking is helping or hurting. Ruminating over possible negative outcomes is usually less helpful to your mental health than paying attention to the present moment and taking things one day at a time.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH: Make it a priority to engage in healthy activities, such as exercising vigorously at least 3 days per week, sleeping 7-9 hours per night, moderating alcohol use, and eating a balanced diet. It's common for our healthy habits to drop out of the picture when tensions get high, which can lead to a downward spiral.

TALK IT OUT: In addition to using these self-management strategies, it's important to stay connected with others. We are always stronger together. Your number one best resources are your wingmen, family, and friends because they are already part of your life. The AUAB helping agencies are also here for you, including Mental Health (455-5227), the Chaplain Corps (437-8811), and the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (dial 123 from any AUAB phone).

Additional information:

- CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fcoping.html
- WHO: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2