

COVID-19 Update

September 10: Back-to-School Stress Management and Maintaining Wellness

In today's issue, NMH Physician Health Liaison and Psychiatrist Joan Anzia, MD, and Director of Physician Well-Being Gaurava Agarwal, MD, share information and resources to help maintain wellness and manage stress as children head back to school.

As we enter our seventh month of living with COVID-19 in the U.S, we've learned a lot about the virus, but we're still coping with adjustments to living with the impact. This phase brings its own stressors:

- Ongoing loneliness or too many family members in the house at once
- Missing extended family members
- Challenges to taking vacations or planning family events
- Fatigue from too much time working online at home
- Daily concerns about our health and the health of our families
- Financial stress
- Social justice issues
- Missing conferences, postponing weddings and canceling graduations

As we move into fall and prepare for potential new challenges, it's important that we regularly take the time to acknowledge, mitigate and reduce the impact of stress on our bodies and minds.

Managing stress and maintaining wellness

There are several basic steps you can take that will help mitigate the impact of stress:

- Keep a regular sleep-wake schedule
- Maintain a balance of work, rest and play during the day
- Sleep eight hours a night
- Get regular exercise
- Eat a healthy diet
- Find safe and comfortable ways to socialize with family, friends and neighbors
- Avoid catastrophic or black-and-white thinking about the pandemic
- Foster a hopeful outlook

A variety of online tools can help with both physical and mental stress reduction. For bodily stress, "tactical breathing" demonstrations are available on YouTube. This exercise will reduce your heart rate. For calming our minds, apps such as **Headspace**, or for healthcare providers, **Ten Percent Happier**, are extremely effective.

The **COVID-19 Wellness Resources** section on the Physician Well-Being site on Physician Forum contains a variety of resources to help physicians and providers manage stress and maintain wellness. Please visit the links below to learn more:

- [Support Resources](#)
- [Mental Wellness Resources](#)
- [Physical Wellness Resources](#)

For those with school-aged children

Whether your children have returned to school in person or are learning remotely, this is a stressful and unprecedented situation for everyone. It's helpful to remind ourselves that this adjustment is temporary and that the majority of children adapt well to change.

For parents with younger children who require supervision while virtual learning at home, it can be helpful (if possible) to engage grandparents, other family members, neighbors in pods, or college and high school students to take on some of the role of monitoring and supervising them during online learning. Consider creating a chat forum or Google doc with colleagues at work or with parents at your child's school to identify possible shared resources and brainstorm ideas for best practices.

Adjusting your own expectations to what you, the teachers and your children can reasonably manage during this time is important. Some routine activities will need to be delayed or postponed indefinitely. A self-compassion practice that can be helpful is asking yourself, "What would I say to a friend who was beating themselves up or struggling with this guilt?" Then, treat yourself with that same kindness.

For parents who are anxious about their children returning to in-person school, consider visiting the school once or twice to assure yourself that safety is being maintained. Conveying your confidence in the school's safety will go a long way in reassuring your children as well.

Finally, for parents with older children, be sure to acknowledge the grief and disappointment you and your children might be facing with the start of their senior or freshmen years. Modeling how one handles situations that are outside anyone's control can be one of the most valuable emotional regulation lessons one can teach.

A variety of **Family & Child Care** resources are available on the Physician Forum, including resources to assist your child cope, support for learning at home, guidance for students and parents, and a self-care for resilience toolkit. Click the link above to learn more.

Thank you to all NM physicians and clinicians for your ongoing commitment, collaboration and leadership in providing exceptional *Patients First* care.



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