

Tips to Maintain Your Wellbeing and Reduce Anxiety During the Pandemic

In the midst of COVID-19, we're all so focused on taking care of our physical health, avoiding infection, that we often neglect to also take care of our mental wellbeing. This can be as important both for ourselves, as well as our families. Finding ways to keep calm can help reduce the spread of anxiety.

There are so many stressors right now: changes in work and family life, daily routines, living arrangements, family finances. These are different for everybody and often in very significant and sometimes undesirable ways. There is so much unknown and a lot of misinformation that can make these concerns worse.

Everyone is affected by stress differently. These types of situations often make anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, eating disorders and other mental health issues worse or may even bring out these symptoms when they didn't exist before. Sometimes there is more conflict at home when family members are confined together or worsening mental health due to prolonged isolation.

There has been a lot of research on how to maintain mental health and wellbeing, as well as lessons learned from past epidemics. Lincoln Financial's goal is to help employers communicate more with their workforce about these issues, enabling them to take proactive steps to reduce mental health problems. Here are some recommendations:

- **Take Care of Your Mind and Body.** Let's face it. This is a very stressful time and it's affecting everybody's mental condition. Take stock of how this is affecting you. Many people are experiencing similar feelings and emotions. For me, it's mostly insomnia. For others, it's something different, but everybody is experiencing some mental health effect. We know that it's important to take care of yourself physically, but that's not just avoiding infection. A good diet, regular exercise, getting outdoors as much as you can safely, and good sleep habits all positively impact both physical and mental health. Staying occupied with something useful is a good way to stay focused. Some meditation, even just a period of short relaxation, can be very helpful.
- **Limit Exposure to News and Social Media.** We're all getting bombarded by news and social media, which includes a flood of medical information. I think it's important to limit our exposure. Much of the online material that I see now is sensational, repetitious, and designed to engage rather than inform and reassure. Therefore, it's important to get information from trusted sites like a state health department and the Centers for Disease Control. I've personally turned off all my news alerts and I've set aside a specific time each morning to read the news and review medical updates. Then I leave it alone and guess what? I find I'm sleeping a lot better as a result!
- **Tap Technology to Stay Connected.** But the internet can have a very positive role during this crisis. Loneliness is one of the most common complaints of people who've had a transition to working at home, and many people who are now in social isolation. It's important to stay connected, engage your family, friends, coworkers and community. These contacts are important for everyone and really can decrease anxiety. Take advantage of video chat software if you have it. There are several apps that are now available at no cost. Some of us are having a regular virtual dinner with friends and family. These connections are a great source of support and it's also an opportunity to help others who are isolated or anxious. Several of my coworkers have set up a daily video check in about how life is going, what challenges everybody's facing, and how they're coping, before starting the work day. It's important to share your feelings with the people you trust. It's much easier to face these challenges when you find out that you're not alone.
- **Establish a Normal Routine for the Kids.** Good parenting skills may be more important now than ever. We know that children do better when parents listen to their concerns, calmly answer their questions and reassure them that they are safe. We can set an example by calm and reasonable behavior. The experts who have studied this recommend a normal routine that includes study and homework, exercise and staying in touch with friends, not only for our whole family, but for us as well. If possible, it's a good idea to avoid using screen time for babysitting (I know it's hard!).
- **Try to Separate Work and Home.** If you can, set up a separate place and dedicated time away from the family for your work, so everyone knows when and where you will be holding work calls and sending emails. Personally, I'm finding it's just too easy to be working 24-7 at home without drawing these boundaries. And I know it's been a

difficult transition for many people who suddenly find themselves working at home. Try to focus on the positive aspects of moving to a virtual environment, like no commute, a more relaxed dress code, better meal choices, more flexibility, and being around more for your kids.

- **Know When to Seek Professional Help.** If your anxiety is interfering with your ability to function, it's time to seek help—and do so before it gets worse. Fortunately, there are more mental health professionals available online and through telemedicine now than ever. A good place to start is your company's EAP program or your doctor's practice or community mental health services. We've learned in past epidemics that these services are very effective when people use them when they need them, and they can really help lower anxiety and help people cope.

Anxiety might play a greater role in everyone's daily lives a bit more than usual. But the key is finding ways to strengthen your mental wellbeing before it creates more significant issues, especially long-term. For more resources related to mental health and COVID-19, please visit the CDC's Mental Health and COVID page, the CSTS page on helping children stuck at home, an excellent resource page from the State of Washington, and Lincoln Financial's COVID-19 Hub.

LCN-3192468-080620