



overview

Women's Health Overview

Wellness Tips for the COVID-19 Pandemic

"It's easy to lose perspective when we are stressed. Taking time to reflect on what's important to you can really improve your outlook."

In these times of uncertainty and stress, it is helpful to focus on things we can do for our emotional health. While there is a lot in our world that is outside of our control, there is a lot we can do to control our own mental environment. Consider the "four R's":

- Relationships
- Routines
- Relaxation
- Reflection

Relationships

In our current environment, our normal ways of connecting in person with people at work and at home have changed. But we can still stay connected by phone, text messaging, social media, and video conferencing. Don't forget about traditional letter-writing — a time-tested way of staying in touch as well. Focus especially on connecting with older adults who may be at more risk for isolation — those who are home bound or live in assisted living and skilled nursing facilities. They need our attention now more than ever.

Routines

It's easy to get out of our normal self-care routines, like exercise, healthy eating, and adequate sleep. Make these a priority. There are many online exercise programs now, if you can't do your normal routine

see Wellness Tips pg. 4

COVID-19 Resources

With information changing rapidly and rumors abundant on social media, it's important to know which websites have reliable and up-to-date information about COVID-19, or coronavirus. The following sources report not only facts and updates, but also tips and directions on such important practices as hand washing, self quarantine, and how to cope while homebound.

- [NebraskaMed.com/COVID](https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID)
- [Coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) (a CDC site)
- [MayoClinic.org/COVID19](https://www.mayoclinic.org/COVID19)
- [WHO.int/health-topics/coronavirus](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus)

Here are phone numbers to assist with information and disease screening.

- Douglas County Health
Department: 402-444-3400
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services: 402-552-6645

UNMC has launched a mobile app to screen individuals who are concerned that they may have COVID-19.

1-Check COVID is available for free on the Apple App Store.



From the chairman

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Many of us are staring fear and anxiety in the face during this unsure time. The novel coronavirus threatens all of us, especially those vulnerable populations of the elderly, very young children, and those with existing health conditions that make them immunocompromised. In these stressful times, it can be hard to cope with daily life, let alone new concerns about our health and that of our loved ones. How can we reduce our anxiety?

First and foremost, turn off media. It's important to give yourself a break from the constant news coverage, much of which emphasizes the doom and gloom aspects of the world in which we find ourselves. If you must stay tuned in, take a tip from Mr. Rogers and "look for the helpers." So many people worldwide are working day and night to help those who are sick and prevent further infection in the healthy population. Our own doctors and nurses at the Nebraska Medical Center are leading the charge in diagnosis and treatment of coronavirus patients. Always look for the helpers, rather than focusing on the negative.

Next, take care of yourself and your body. Try watching a yoga video online, or pull up some calming music and try to meditate. Keep up your fitness routine, or try something new. Don't forget that you can still take a walk or run outside, as long as you stay six feet away from others. Even simply taking a hot bath or shower can help you feel present and in control of your own body. Avoid alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism. Get lots of sleep!

Finally, make sure to check in on your loved ones. Utilize the technologies of voice and video chat to ensure they have what they need to stay or get well. Connection, even virtual, to important others in our lives gives us purpose and much-needed validation.

We will persevere through these extraordinary times, and come out stronger on the other side.

Carl V. Smith, MD, FACOG

Chairman
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research news

Chemical Exposure and Reproductive Health

Direct or indirect chemical exposures can adversely affect reproductive health. Endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) can reduce fertility by interfering with the normal actions of internal hormones. Exposure to EDCs during fetal development, prior to puberty, or during adulthood can have serious implications for female fertility through disruption of normal reproductive function. The basic unit of the female reproductive system is the ovarian follicle. Each follicle contains an oocyte (egg). Women begin puberty with about 400,000 follicles. However, chemicals can selectively target a follicle population in the ovary, resulting in either temporary or permanent infertility.

EDC exposure comes from various sources including industrial products like detergents and flame-retardants, agrochemicals such as pesticides and everyday household items including cosmetics, toys, food and food storage items like metal cans and plastic bottles. Human exposure occurs mainly through ingestion of dust, water, and food, inhalation of gases and particles in the air and absorption

through the skin. Toxic effects are dose dependent and may vary based on frequency and method of exposure. Some chemicals may stay in the environment and in the body for a prolonged period of time and accumulate.

Endocrine disrupting chemicals not only reduce the numbers of follicles in the ovary, but also reduce egg quality and interfere with the actions of steroid hormones. Bisphenol A (commonly known as BPA) is a plastic ingredient that affects the female reproductive system via endocrine disruption, resulting in reproductive cycle disturbances, miscarriage, altered egg maturation and decreased fertilization. Several studies in laboratory animals are emerging indicating negative reproductive effects of glyphosate exposure. Glyphosate is the main ingredient in a commonly used pesticide. Studies show it may cause impaired ovarian and uterine development, decreased estrogen secretion, and pregnancy complications such as embryonic loss, birth defects and premature birth.

The synthetic surfactants used in common household and industrial products are a main source of water contamination. These chemicals, referred to as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), are often detected in humans. These chemicals have several negative implications for female health, such as reduced fetal growth, low birth weights, disturbances in thyroid function, and increased rates of cancer. However, their direct effects on ovarian function remain to be determined. Given the persistence of PFAS in the environment, studies on reproductive health should be considered of high importance.

New research to identify mechanisms that disrupt ovarian function and cause follicle loss can lead to the development of preventative therapies in order to maintain a healthy reproductive lifespan. In addition to positive fertility outcomes, the preservation of female health prevents the onset of other disorders related to the cessation or dysfunction of ovarian activity.

Contributed by John S. Davis, PhD
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because the gym is closed. Eating 5-7 servings of fruits and vegetables per day can improve your health and may enhance immune function. Lastly, sleep is always important and often overlooked as a way to stay healthy. Getting at least 7-8 hours of sleep is recommended for most adults, but many Americans voluntarily give up some of their sleep time. This can lead to increased anxiety symptoms, according to recent research. So do your best to get those ZZZs!

Relaxation

There are many ways to relax. Listening to music, reading poetry or novels, and watching movies are popular, of course. In addition to these great ideas, consider a simple form of meditation that can reduce stress levels. This was developed by the Benson-Henry Institute of Mind Body Medicine at Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital and has been taught to thousands of people over the last 40 years. Here's how to do it:

1. Get into a comfortable sitting position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Breathe slightly slower and deeper than you ordinarily would.
4. As you exhale, say the word, "One" silently, inside your head. Try to make the saying of "one" as long as the breath you are exhaling.
5. Continue for about 10 minutes. Don't set a timer, just look at the time when you start and open your eyes periodically to check the time.
6. Keep a passive attitude – don't try to force it. Know that distracting thoughts will come; that's perfectly normal. When they do, just say, "Oh, well" and remind yourself to go back to focusing on your breath and saying "One."
7. It will take you a week or two to get the hang of this, but if you keep practicing, it will get easier and easier to invoke a relaxed state of mind that will last well after you have finished a session.

Considerable scientific research has demonstrated the amazing benefits of regular meditation. In addition to reducing anxiety, improving sleep, and helping you focus your attention, there is exciting evidence that it may reduce the usual age-related atrophy or shrinkage of the brain. So find a comfortable chair and start today!

Reflection

Our last "R" gives us a chance to get a little perspective. It's easy to lose perspective when we are stressed. Taking time to reflect on what's important to you can really improve your outlook. One way to do this is to keep a gratitude journal. To do this, set aside a few minutes once or twice a week to write down three things that you are grateful for that happened since you last wrote in your journal. It's best to look for three new things each time you do this. Research has shown that by regularly taking stock of the positives in your life, you will, over time, become more optimistic and see those positives that are all around us.

Contributed by Steven Wengel, MD

*Assistant Vice Chancellor for Campus Wellness
UNMC/UNO*

Mission Statement

The mission of the Olson Center for Women's Health is to provide a national comprehensive health science center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). Based in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the center enables UNMC to make distinctive strides in education, research, and service through innovative approaches to women's health issues.

Want More Information?

Visit our website: OlsonCenter.com

Learn more about our health care providers, services, and programs available at the Olson Center for Women's Health. Our website also offers women's health information. Here are a few topics:

- Breastfeeding
- Breast Health and Disease
- Cardiovascular Health
- Gastrointestinal Health
- Gynecologic Health
- Reproductive Endocrinology/Infertility
- Pregnancy
- Wellness
- Incontinence

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Helping Kids Cope with COVID-19

We are all coping with anxiety and stress related to the coronavirus pandemic. Many parents are balancing working from home with the responsibility of home schooling their children. How can we know how these stressful changes are affecting our kids? What can we do to assuage their fears and help them feel safe during this uncertain time?

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Some signs of stress to look for in younger children include excessive crying or irritation and returning to outgrown behaviors such as bed wetting. Teens may “act out” or turn to alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Children of all ages may struggle with or avoid schoolwork, get into unhealthy eating and/or sleeping habits, avoid activities they previously enjoyed, have difficulty concentrating or paying attention, experience unexplained headaches or body pains, and display excessive worry or sadness.

You can help your child feel less fearful by sharing facts with them, to the extent that they are capable of understanding. Explain what is going on now and give them clear information about how to reduce their risk of being infected by the disease in words they can understand depending on their age. This also includes providing information about what could happen in a reassuring way (e.g. a family member and/or the child may start not feeling well and may have to go to the hospital for some time so doctors can help them feel better.) If your child asks about something and you don't know the answer, say so. Use the question as a chance to find out together. Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for up-to-date, reliable information about coronavirus. That way, you have the facts and kids don't see headlines about deaths and other scary information.

Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is OK if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you. Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, wash your hands, exercise, and eat well.

Another way to reduce your child's stress is to keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible, or help create new ones in a new environment, including school/learning as well as time for safely playing and relaxing. Give your child specific things they can do to feel in control. Teach them that getting lots of sleep and washing their hands well and often can help them stay strong and well. If they are worried about loved ones, help them video chat or call their grandparents, friends, etc.

Teenagers may experience problems with social distancing. Teenagers tend to feel invincible, and may use the excuse that coronavirus tends to be less severe for their age group as an excuse to break with protocol. Bonding with peers is an essential developmental task for teens and young adults. Acknowledge that you know it's frustrating for them to be cut off from friends. Listen to what they're feeling, validate those feelings and then be direct about how you can work together to make this situation bearable. Loosening rules about time spent on social media, for instance, will help compensate for the socializing time lost with school closings.

Keep checking in with your kids as time goes on. Children need adults' love and attention even more during difficult times. Give them room to share how they are feeling and acknowledge the real stress they may be under. Then express confidence in your child's ability to rebound.

This time of crisis offers an opportunity for families to bond while staying home. Look for chances to better connect with your kids and continue to model best practices.

Information collected from
CDC.gov
kidshealth.org
WHO.int



OLSON CENTER FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

olsoncenter.com

upcoming events

Women's Health Week Photo Contest

Join the Olson Center for Women's Health as we celebrate Women's Health Week!

Send us a photo of you engaging in a healthful behavior (exercising, cooking, etc) for a chance to win a fabulous wellness prize package! Get creative with your submissions! We are taking entries from May 10 through May 16. We will announce the winner the week of May 17.

Email your submissions to noelle.blood@unmc.edu with:

1. Subject line: Women's Health Week Photo Contest
2. A high quality jpeg photo attachment
3. Your name, email, and phone number
4. A brief description of what you are doing in the photo

All submissions must be completed via email. Winner must be able to physically pick up their prize on the UNMC campus in Omaha, NE.

If anyone else is pictured in your photo, please indicate that they have given verbal or written consent to be pictured. Any minors pictured must include written consent from a parent.

For more information and official rules, visit
unmc.edu/obgyn/community/womens-health-week

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