

WELLNESS WEDNESDAY TIPS

COPING WITH UNCERTAINTY

One of the difficulties with the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on our lives is the uncertainty of when we can resume our typical daily lives. Do you find yourself worrying and becoming more anxious with thoughts of – *When will ...?, What if ...?, How will ...?* -- related to classes, clerkships, research, summer plans, Step exams, residency applications, or finances, health and family concerns? Are you having difficulty redirecting from these thoughts?

We all have different levels of tolerance for uncertainty. While some of us have more affinity for risk-taking, others are more comfortable with a structured routine with little variability. But no matter how much we plan, unexpected things happen. Uncertainty is a part of life; we can't control everything.

We all desire to have a sense of control over our lives. When our sense of control is challenged by uncertainty, we can experience stress, anxiety, lower mood, helplessness, feeling overwhelmed, or other feelings.

Some patterns for coping with uncertainty are not especially effective. Excessive worrying isn't helpful or productive in the long run. It takes energy, and takes focus away from tasks and activities, decreasing our effectiveness dealing with current matters. Behaviors such as procrastination and avoidance, frequently asking for reassurance, you trying to do everything yourself and not asking for assistance, and micromanaging others' behaviors also aren't helpful and may increase your stress.

Although we can't change the uncertainty of current circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic, there **are** steps you can take to cope with ongoing uncertainty.

FOCUS ON AREAS OF YOUR LIFE THAT YOU CAN CURRENTLY CONTROL

Yes, you have heard it from the MSCC counselors before, but ...

Create a schedule – include times for study, breaks, meals, exercise, and leisure

Your schedule doesn't have to be the same as it was before social distancing. Try things and figure out what works now for you. Make adjustments as needed.

Make choices that work for you -- These may be different than others' choices

Tend to self-care Eating, sleeping, exercising, leisure

Focus on your current work, assignments, and academic preparation

MANAGE YOUR ANXIETY

Engage in physical activity. Exercise, dance in your living room, run around the block, complete a household chore in quick time. Physical movement can work off physical energy associated with anxiety and provide distraction.

Cut down on checking the news if that is contributing to your anxiety.

Limit what you talk about or how long you talk with friends or others if it increases your anxiety. Anxiety is also contagious.

Learn relaxation, meditation, mindfulness, or other techniques. There are a ton of YouTube videos on these techniques.

Talk with a MSCC counselor, your PCP, or a mental health provider if you need assistance managing anxiety.

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

Mindfulness techniques are helpful with this.

You can begin by focusing on your breathing.

Notice what your body is feeling like as you participate in various activities.

If your mind wanders, return it to the here and now.

Begin to recognize and try to limit negative thinking patterns that can increase stress.

Thinking patterns such as negative predictions about the future and catastrophizing are based on assumptions without solid evidence. Recognize when they are occurring and redirect your thinking.

Ask yourself:

“How is this thought helping me?”

“What would (some trusted person) say about this thought?”

ACKNOWLEDGE AND RECOGNIZE YOUR EMOTIONS

Not acknowledging your emotions can result in increasing stress.

Don't judge your emotions. Use them as information about what you are experiencing.

Remind yourself that your emotions don't have to drive your behaviors.

Circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic have been disruptive and stressful, challenging sense of control as the uncertainty continues. But there are things you can do to manage and increase your sense of control as we move through this time.

HelpGuide. “Dealing with Uncertainty During the Coronavirus Pandemic”. Lawrence Robinson and Melinda Smith. April 2020.

American Psychological Association. “The Great Unknown: 10 Tips for Dealing with Stress of Uncertainty”.

Feel free to contact the MSCC for questions or concerns.

Stay healthy!

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