

Practicing Self-Care in the COVID-19 Response: A Guide for Public Health Professionals

March 31, 2020

OVERVIEW

When supporting COVID-19 prevention efforts in your state or territory, it's normal for even the most experienced public health officials to struggle adjusting to the minute-to-minute disruptions to their daily routine. Due to the mounting sense of urgency surrounding the response, it can be easy to deny yourself permission to relax. However, for you to be as effective as possible, it is vital that you take time to de-stress and connect with others. Below are a few strategies and resources you can use to care for yourself and others during this time.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES AND TOOLS



Take care of your own health by getting adequate sleep, exercise, and maintaining good nutrition.



Take breaks from work and media coverage to recharge and refocus.



Stay connected. Reach out to friends, family, and colleagues for social support.



Stay grounded. Practice mindfulness through meditation, yoga, or exercise. There are many online tools that can offer guidance.



Talk to someone about your feelings. Seek therapeutic support when necessary, especially when experiencing feelings of chronic stress, apathy, anxiety, anger, depression, or helplessness.

Below are some resources on self-care and stress reduction from other state health agencies:



A new Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment resource, [“Reducing fear and taking care of yourself”](#), offers strategies for managing anxiety during the COVID-19 response.



The Minnesota Department of Health developed a behavioral health and emergency preparedness [resource page](#) tailored to the COVID-19 response.



The Wisconsin Department of Health Services created a [self-care pocket reference guide](#) for emergency response deployment, which includes a post-deployment self-assessment, a deployment packing list, and self-reflection questions.



The New Jersey Department of Human Services developed a self-care [factsheet](#) for public health emergency workers with daily tips for stress management. Here are their suggestions on ten things to do each day:

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Eat enough of the right foods.
3. Vary the work that you do.
4. Do some light exercise.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Pray, meditate, or relax.
9. Share a private joke.
10. Support a colleague.

RESOURCES

- [Emergency responders: Tips for taking care of yourself](#). CDC. March 19, 2018.
- [Stress and coping: COVID-19](#). CDC. March 23, 2020.
- [Sustaining the well-being of healthcare personnel during coronavirus and other infectious disease outbreaks](#). Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. 2020.
- [Tips for disaster responders: Understanding compassion fatigue](#). SAMHSA. 2014.
- [What is secondary traumatic stress?](#) Administration for Children and Families. March 26, 2020.

DISCLAIMER

This document is intended to highlight a few of the personal challenges public health professionals may face during the COVID-19 response. It is not a resource for self-diagnosis or a substitute for proper medical or therapeutic care. In the case of an emergency, contact your health care professional or dial 911.

For questions, feedback, or additional information, please email preparedness@astho.org.