



Aging Well: The Keys to Staying Mentally Healthy

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Boulder Community Health

Tonight's Topics

- The state of older adults' mental health, specifically depression
- How can we look after our mental well-being
- Ways to build mental resilience during the pandemic

What is Mental Health?



- Our mental health is about how we think and feel:
 - our outlook on life
 - how we're able to cope with life's ups and downs
- It's an essential part of our overall health.

A Look Into

Older Adults' Mental Health

- 1 in 4 adults 65yrs+ experience some type of mental health concern.
- Most common conditions: depression, anxiety, severe cognitive impairment.



Depression

- As age-associated illnesses increase, so does the rate of depression.
 - 11.5% to 13.5% of older adults have depression, which is double that of the rest of the adult population.
- Almost 5% of seniors have experienced a major depressive disorder episode in the last year.

Who Struggles With Depression?

- 1% to 5% of elderly people living independently in the community
- 11.5 % of the elderly who are hospitalized
- 14% of those who require health assistance at home
- 29% to 52% of living in nursing home
- 39% to 47% with serious illness

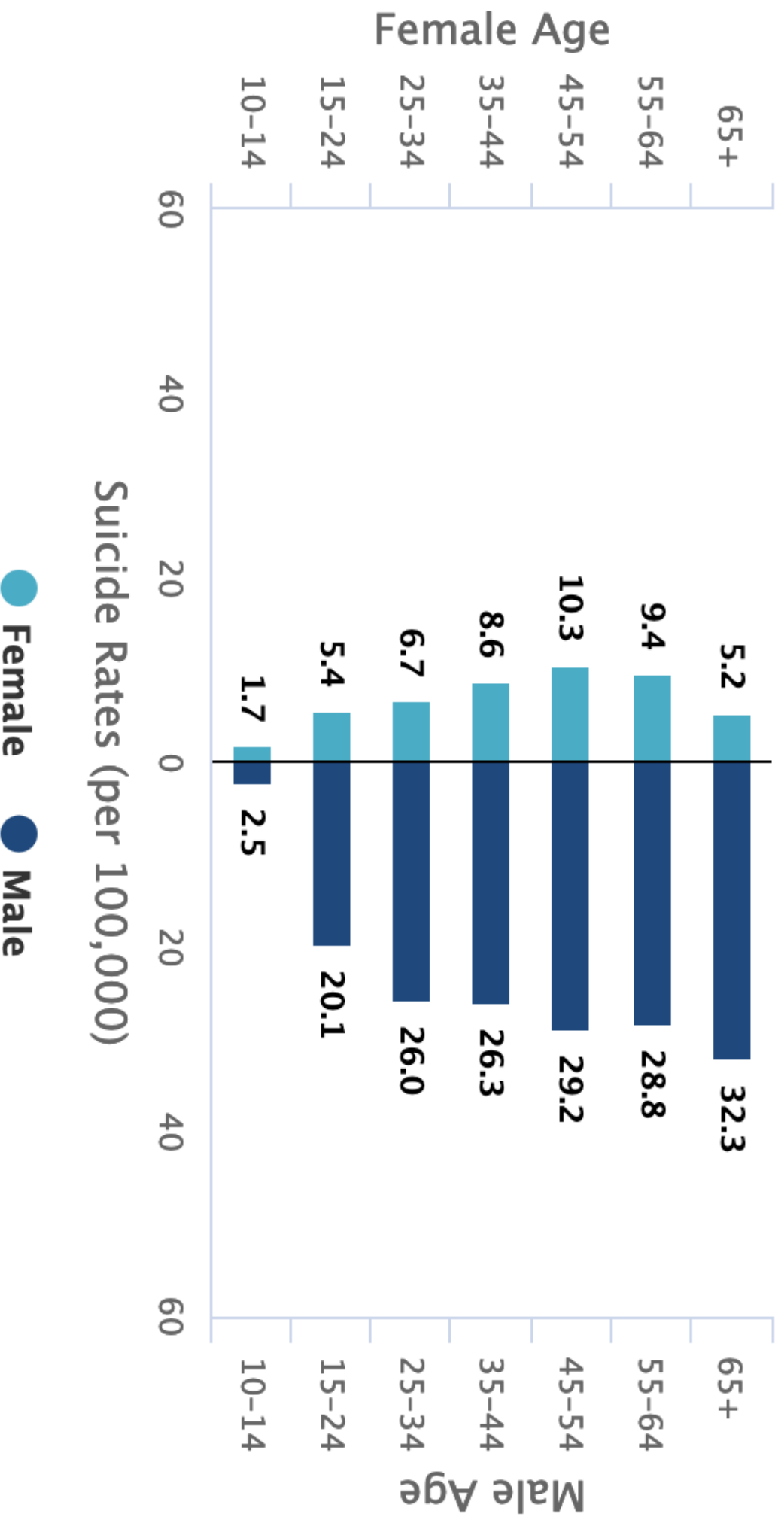


The Significance of Depression in Older Adults

- Often adversely affects the course and complicates the treatment of other chronic diseases.
- Older adults with depression:
 - Visit the doctor and emergency room more often
 - Use more medication
 - Incur higher outpatient charges
 - Stay longer in the hospital

Suicide Rates for Males and Females by Age in the United States (2016)

Data Courtesy of CDC



Elder Suicide Facts

- Older adults comprise about 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for almost 18 percent of all suicides.
- People 85 yrs+ have the highest suicide rate of any age group
 - White men 85 yrs+ take their lives at *six times* the rate of the general population.



You're More Likely to Have Depression Over Age 65 If You...

- Are a woman
- Have a chronic illness or chronic pain
- Take certain medications
- Are disabled
- Don't sleep well
- Spend a lot of time alone
- Have a family history of depression
- Lack of a supportive social network
- Abuse alcohol or drugs
- Are going through a stressful life event

Signs of Depression are Sometimes Missed

- Less than 30% of older adults with depression receive treatment.
 - Confused with the effects of multiple illnesses.
 - Seniors themselves ignore symptoms.
 - Stereotypes about aging.
- Mistaken for reaction to loss of social support systems and change in circumstances.



Warning Signs of Geriatric Depression

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or unintended weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause that do not ease even with treatment

Geriatric Treatment for Depression



- Psychiatry – medication options
- Traditional outpatient / in-home psychotherapy
- Integrated medical & mental health treatment
- Case management
- Grief counseling / support
 - Loss of friends and family
 - Loss of function, place/role, home
- Group therapy: support/skills
- Peer support (individual & group)
- Activities and socializing (online)

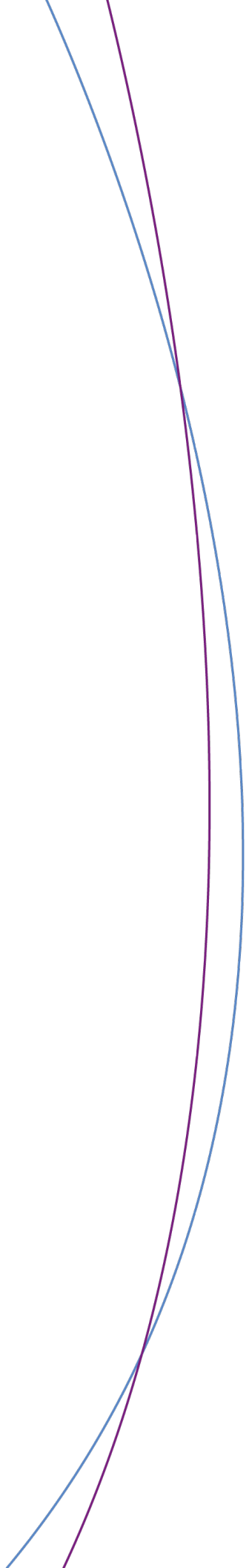
What BCH

Primary Care Providers Do...

- Screen patients with a **Patient Health Questionnaire** (at Medicare Wellness Exams)
- Determine when to introduce different treatment modalities:
 - “Watchful waiting”
 - Medications
 - Hand-off to BCH Integrated Behavioral Health
- How is this decided?
 - Different for every provider and their relationship with patient...

BCH's Integrated Behavioral Health Services

- Each BCH primary care clinic has some level of integrated behavioral care available onsite.
- The integrated behavioral team can be called in by a primary care provider to help patients work with mental health struggles.



How to look after our mental well-being



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Tip 1:

Talk about problems and concerns

- **Who to talk to:**
 - Friends and family
 - Someone with specialist knowledge
 - A counselor or therapist
 - Find support groups in times of change
- **Say what you feel**
- **Listen and learn**

Tip 2:

Learn to cope with change

- Focus on the things you're grateful for.
- Acknowledge and process your feelings.
- Accept the things you can't change.
- Look for the silver lining.
- Take daily action to deal with life's challenges.

Tip 3: Stay Physically Active

Regular physical activity and exercise:

- Boosts self-esteem, raises self-worth and improves confidence.
- Provides a meaningful activity.
- Promotes good sleep patterns.
- Has a profound effect on the brain, helping prevent memory loss, cognitive decline, and dementia.

Exercise tips for older adults

- Check with your doctor first.
- Find an activity you like and that motivates you to continue.
- Start slow.
- Exercise doesn't have to mean strenuous activity.
- Exercise – at a distance – with a friend or family member.

Tip 4: Keep Your Mind Active

There are many ways of doing this:

- Tackling puzzles
- Playing games
- Reading
- Using your memory
- Using mental arithmetic

Try variations on what you know:

- Try out new cooking recipes
- More challenging crosswords
- Different food types

Learn or do something new:

- Instrument, foreign language
- Write your memoirs or a play about your life experiences

Work on something new each day.



Tip 5: Get Plenty of Sleep

- **A proven way to look after our mental and physical well-being:**
 - Better concentration
 - Better mood
 - Stronger immune system
- **Sleep patterns can change with age and may be influenced by:**
 - Caffeine or alcohol intake
 - Pain
 - Medication
 - The need to go to the toilet
- **Different people need different amounts of sleep.**

Develop Healthy Sleep Habits

- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and cool.
- Avoid artificial light from screens (TVs and computers) for at least one hour before bed.
- Maintain a regular schedule where your sleep/wake hours do not fluctuate.



Tip 6: Eat and Drink Sensibly


- **Eat a balanced and healthy diet**
 - AARP survey found that men and women age 50 and over who reported eating more nutritious and well-balanced meals also had higher mental well-being scores than those who said they rarely ate nutritious meals.
 - Avoid sugary foods and refined carbs.
 - Load up on high-fiber fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day.
- **Stay hydrated**
- **Drink moderately**
 - Women: up to 1 alcoholic drink per day
 - Men: up to 2 alcoholic drinks per day



Tip 7:

Be Aware of the Link Between Mental Well-Being and Dementia

- Having a purpose can reduce your risk.
- The more active and the more you use and sharpen your brain, the more benefits you will get.



How to Build Resilience During the Pandemic

*Resilience means being able to adapt to
life's misfortunes and setbacks.*



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Accept Your Feelings

Are you feeling?

- Anxious
- Stressed
- Worried
- Fearful
- Low
- Lonely
- Overwhelmed
- Helpless
- Frustrated
- Guilty
- Angry



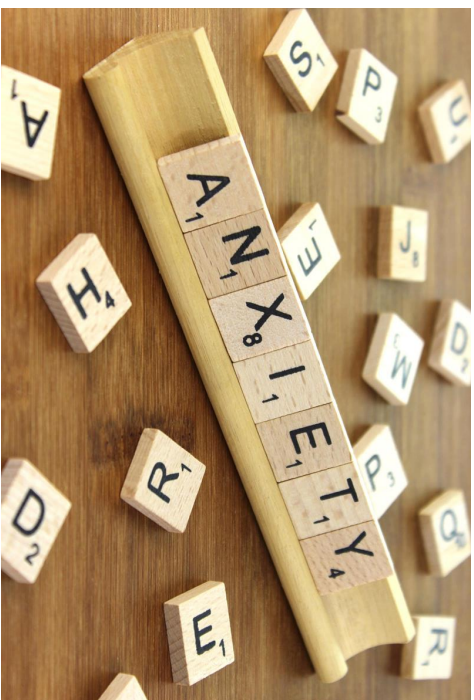
ANGER

is but one letter short of DANGER

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Anxiety

- Unhelpful thinking patterns we experience when the mind fixates on threat, uncertainty and negativity.
 - Brain's survival mechanism



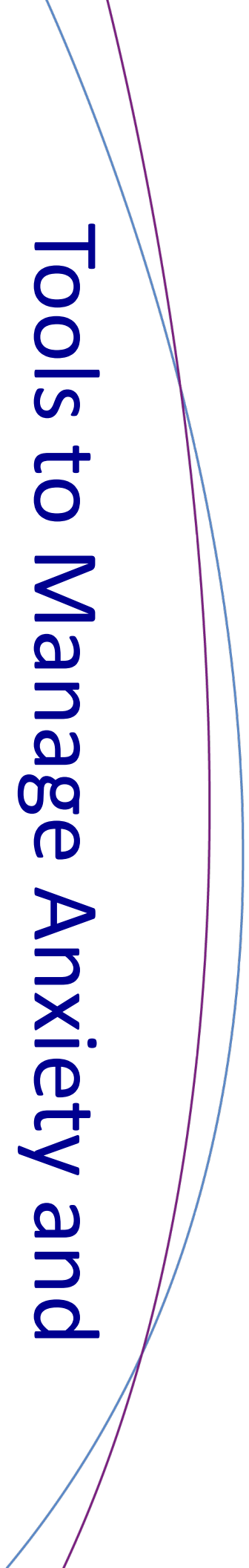
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Anxiety and Stress

- Anxiety can occur on its own or as a response to stress.
- Stress manifests in the body - racing heart, sweaty palms.
- Autostress - when our body's stress response goes on for a long time.
- Signs of autostress include:
 - Chest tightness and feeling like you can't breathe
 - Muscle tension, aches and pains
 - Headaches
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Restlessness and an inability to relax
 - Heart palpitations
 - Digestive issues

Anxiety: What to look out for

Unhelpful thinking pattern	Examples
Threat Scanning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequently checking your body for coronavirus symptoms.• Obsessively checking the news for coronavirus updates.
Catastrophizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You feel chest tightness and your mind tells you that you have coronavirus and that your life is in danger.• Your mind gives you the mental image of losing all the people you love.
Hypothetical Worry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I know I’m following all the guidelines, but what if I spread the virus?”• “What if someone gets too close to me at the supermarket and I catch it?”
Emotional Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I feel scared, so I must be in danger.”• “I feel guilty, so I must’ve done something wrong.”
Fortune Telling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I’m going to be stuck inside for months on end.”• “My mental health will keep deteriorating and I’ll have to go back on meds.”



Tools to Manage Anxiety and Unhealthy Thinking Patterns During the Pandemic



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BCH's myStrength

- myStrength is a great resource to help improve your mood and overcome the challenges you face. You can track your health, enjoy interactive activities, and become inspired by quotes and videos.
- **To sign up for myStrength:**
 - Visit myStrength.com, and in the upper right corner click “Sign Up.”
 - Enter this access code: **bchcommunity**
 - Go Mobile! Download the myStrength app for iOS and Android devices at myStrength.com/mobile and SIGN IN using your myStrength email and password.

Take Control of Your Media Diet

- Plan your information diet.
 - From which information sources are you feeding your mind, and how often?
- Stick to a credible source you can trust, such as:
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov)
 - CO Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE.gov)
 - Boulder Community Health (BCH.org)
- Check trusted news source *just once per day*.

Controlling your response to hypothetical worries

Within My Control	Outside My Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building resilience• Following the latest information and advice• Focusing on what's important to me• My information diet• My routine• Relaxation• Cultivating connection• Eating well• Exercising• Seeking and offering support• Voting and activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other people's decisions• Other people's health• The news• The government's actions• Schools opening or closing• The state of the healthcare system• Flights and holidays being cancelled• Traffic• Public transport• Aging• The weather

Source: thewellnesssociety.org

Mind Body Medicine

- Browse mindfulness and meditation resources
 - Meditations found on bch.org/mindbody under [Mind Body Meditation](#)
- Create a scrapbook of your favorite practical wisdom quotes
 - When you notice your mind spiraling, try reviewing your scrapbook to reduce anxiety.

Thought Challenging

The ABCDE Technique:

- **A**ttention – When you feel distressed, stop what you’re doing and pay attention to your inner dialogue. What is your mind telling you?
- **B**elieve – Do not automatically believe your thoughts!
- **C**hallenge – Defuse anxiety by broadening your focus. What’s the bigger picture? Is the thought fact or opinion? What might you think if you were feeling calmer?
- **D**iscount – Acknowledge that anxiety has been dominating your thinking and let the unhelpful thoughts go.
- **E**xplore options – What would be helpful to focus on right now? What options do I have available?

Develop a Regular Exercise Routine

- Schedule a daily walk.
- Complete YouTube video workouts.
- Do online yoga with Yoga with Adriene.
- Invest in some indoor exercise equipment.
- Browse Pinterest for indoor workouts.
- Do an affordable at home cardio workout with a jump rope.



Stay socially connected (even if not face-to-face)

- **Connect with at least one person every day.**
 - Schedule video chat catch ups with friends you haven't spoken to in a while.
 - Have a virtual happy hour over video chat (e.g., Zoom)
 - Browse Meetup.com for online events.
 - Organize a weekly lunch date with a friend over video chat.
 - Use Netflix Party to watch Netflix with your friends online.
 - Start a book club.
 - Play Scrabble and chat to friends using the Words with Friends app.

Reducing Anxiety Through Distraction Activities

- Increase your activity levels and ensure you're meeting your social connection needs.
- Chores you've been putting off.
- Browse new healthy recipes.
- Watch free online documentaries or comedy.
- Work on personal development through journaling.

Examine Your Breathing

- **Shallow breathing:**
 - breathing in too quickly
 - feel like you're not getting enough air
- **Test your breathing:**
 1. Put one hand on your chest, and one on your belly.
 2. Breathe for a few seconds. Which hand rises?
 3. If it's your chest, you might have developed a habit of shallow breathing.

Start a Daily Breathing Practice

- The next time you feel anxious, take a moment to notice your breathing.
- Focus on breathing through your stomach so that your belly rises when you inhale and drops when you exhale.
- Here's a belly breathing exercise you can practice for 5-10 minutes a day:
 - Inhale gently, lightly and slowly count to four, expanding your belly as you do so.
 - Hold that breath for a count of two.
 - Slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of six. This is referred to as belly breathing.

Maintain Structure

- Schedule your day.
- Write your daily to do list the night before.
- Write a weekly goals list. Break tasks down into smaller steps and cross them off as you go to maintain a sense of progress throughout the day.
- Take time to mindfully drink your tea or focus on your breathing.
- Tidy your workspace at the end of the day. Research finds that cluttered environments interfere with your ability to focus.
- Decide on a regular sleep schedule.
- Create an end of day ritual.



Coronavirus Anxiety Workbook

**A Tool to Help You
Build Resilience
During Difficult
Times**

This workbook is uncopyrighted. Please feel free to share it on your website with an attribution and a link to our website.

<https://thewellnesssociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-Anxiety-Workbook-1.pdf>




Thank You!

Questions?



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