

Academy Resource



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COVID-19 Wellness Tips for Ophthalmologists and Their Families

How to cope with and manage stress during this pandemic

Written by **Lisa E. Rogers, MA, LPC, LMFT**

Let's keep this simple; there has been a seismic shift of biblical proportions on the psyche of all of humankind. The aftershocks being felt around the world are affecting every area of our civilization: physical, emotional, spiritual and financial.

The best and brightest of Hollywood could not have crafted this existential crisis. Kris and Kylie Jenner announce they will make hand sanitizer, Tiffany & Co. is advertising stay-at-home quarantine coloring books instead of quality diamonds, Zoom stock is higher than oil stock, Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Prada repurpose their factories to make masks and hospital gowns (PPE), and the Queen of England is celebrating her 94th birthday not with her usual gun salute and parade, but she is taking calls on Zoom.

Meanwhile, our health care system has been devastated.

As a therapist and the wife of an ophthalmologist, I am reaching out to the Academy community to offer some tips on ways to cope with and manage stress during this pandemic.

It's normal to have feelings of guilt, such as, "I'm not doing enough" or "I'm failing at managing my patients and family." By focusing on the process, not the outcome, and by taking good care of yourself, you can quiet these voices of guilt and shame.

Reducing stress is the best way you can deal with this crisis and will help boost your immunity and mental health.

Exercise: If you had an exercise program before the pandemic, try to maintain your routine with virtual classes. Check with your gym trainers who may be offering classes.

Nutrition: Be mindful but realistic about nutrition; try to eat a variety of unprocessed fresh foods. But the occasional craving for a good burger or pizza should be indulged without beating yourself up about it.

Sleep: Try to maintain a healthy sleeping pattern and be mindful of any sudden changes.

Health care: Maintain continuity with current medical and mental health conditions. Watch for worsening symptoms, both physical and mental, such as withdrawal, guilt, fatigue, feeling overwhelmed or the increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. These symptoms need to be addressed with your health care providers.

Socializing: Stay connected. Seek support from family, friends, mentors, clergy and colleagues who are working in similar circumstances.

State of mind: Try to offset stress by mindfulness, music, exercise and yoga.

- Remain hopeful, celebrate success, find things to be grateful for.
- Draw on your spirituality, those who inspire you or your personal beliefs and values.
- Consider the current situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective.
- Utilize positive coping behaviors that have worked well in the past.
- Integrate comedy and laughter as part of your daily living experience to balance out the fears that come from the uncertainty that is all-consuming.
- Incorporate nature by walking outside and getting sunlight and fresh air or walking outside at night and looking at the stars for 10 or so minutes on a daily basis.

Children: Teens and children will react in part on what they see from the adults around them. If you react confidently and calmly, they will be more prepared and better equipped to cope.

- Talk openly and honestly with your children or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak, answer and share facts about COVID-19 in an age-appropriate way to help them process the information.
- Reassure your child or teen that you always are going to prioritize their safety.
- Have a family meeting about how you are protecting yourself at work from exposure to COVID-19 and how you are taking measures to protect everyone.
- Let teens and children know that it is OK to feel angry, frustrated and scared about your exposure to the virus, and then their potential exposure as a result.
- Be aware of the messages your children are getting through the internet, social media and the news. At times, news coverage may become frightening and confusing for them.
- Use this moment to create new family patterns to replace old habits that have not served the family unit well.
- Model good behavior for your family: Exercise, take breaks from the news, get plenty of sleep, eat healthy, well-balanced meals, and encourage virtual connections with friends and family members outside of the home, which can help lower distress and feelings of social isolation.

These tools alone aren't going to fix everything. If your anxiety and moods are out of balance, you need to reach out for professional help from a doctor or therapist.

Above all, remember we are in a time of heightened fear and uncertainty as we are being forced to live out our lives in unnatural circumstances. The need to have compassion for ourselves and others has never been more valuable. The collective trauma of this pandemic with the archetypal image of the cell structure of COVID-19 has imprinted itself on our psyches.

As Gandhi once said, "In the midst of darkness, light persists." Lighting the way, medicine is progressing at an exponential pace; and as a civilization, we are coming out of this plague stronger and healthier as we realize that our survival in the end will depend on our ability to work together.

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In case of an emergency contact your local hospital, call 911 or the National Suicide Line 1-800-273-8255.

This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute a therapeutic relationship.

Resource links:

- Mindfulness Center at Brown University
- Harvard University Center for Wellness and Health Promotion
- Spirit Rock Institute
- Omega Institute
- Garrison Institute
- Jung Center Houston
- Online 12 step meetings

Helpful Apps:

- Head Space app
- Insight Timer app
- Calm app
- COVID Coach app
- 10% Happier app

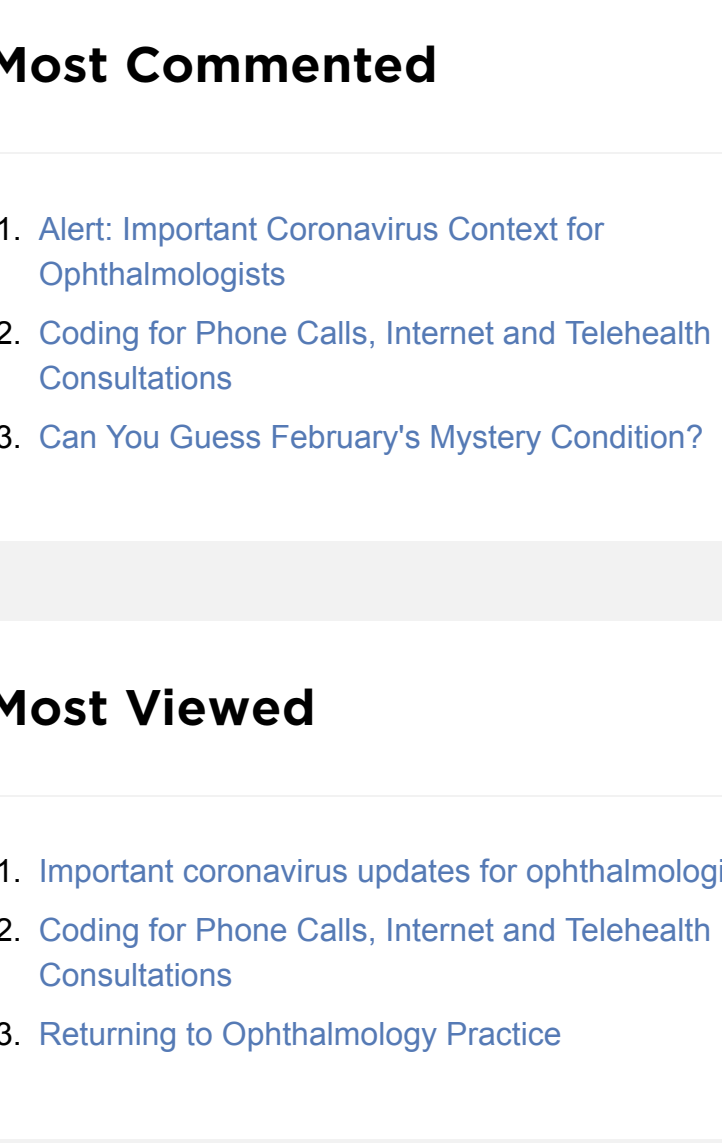
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