

Covid-19 and Psychological Well being

Koç University Counseling Services (KURES)

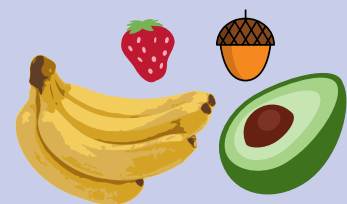
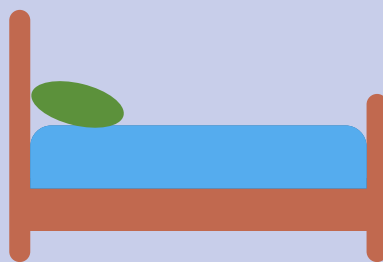
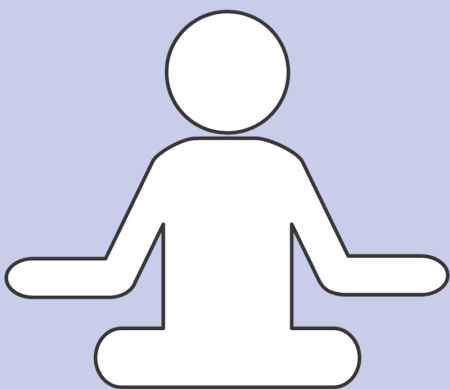
COVID 19 affects us all and our lives are changing very quickly. We are isolating ourselves to stop the spread of the virus and practicing social distancing, which may affect our mental health adversely. The inevitable ambiguity will also put pressure on our emotions and psychological well-being. It is common to feel afraid and worried in the face of uncertainty, lack of control, break out of daily routines, and adversity. However, there are also things that we can control and do to look after our mental health and wellbeing during these times.



Looking after the basics:

Though this may be a little harder during this period you should try to eat a balanced diet (including fresh fruit and vegetables). Drink plenty of water and take vitamins. Your sleep is also very important; the evidence shows that reduced quality in sleeping is associated with feelings of depression and anxiety. You should aim for at least 7 hours a night. Avoid alcohol, tobacco and excessive caffeine.

It is also well known that physical activity improves mental wellbeing. Even though it is challenging to workout at home, if possible, you can try to do physical activity each day. There are many excellent home workout videos available online (Nike training club app, 30 days yoga challenges, quarantine workouts or dancing workout videos on Youtube, and many other different options). You can even do it with the people you are living with at the same house or get your friends and family to join in over the internet.





Connect with others:

Maintaining relationships and sharing similar fears create a strong connection and it is important for psychological wellbeing. It provides emotional support and allows us to support each other. It also gives an opportunity to share experiences and helps to build a sense of belonging.

Staying connected is very important. Luckily, we live in an age where almost everyone is just a phone call away. We should try to regularly stay in touch with others on social media or on the phone. (Facetime family meetings, virtual/online dinners with friends etc).

Media Coverage:

However, it is also important to balance our social media activity. Exposure to media can be useful but also dysfunctional. For some individuals knowing helps to feel a sense of control over the situation while for others it may reinforce anxiety and fear. Consider asking yourself: "How will reading/listening the next news will help me?" and turn off the social media for a while if it is increasing your distress. You might follow the news at specific times, and from reliable sources like WHO and governmental pages. Be aware that there may be many rumours during a crisis, especially on social media.



Have a routine & Keep your brain active:

Create new daily routines for yourself and stick to it! Even if it is just small things like waking up/having your meals at the same time each day or doing your workout in specific time. Plan your week for online learning and create a studying schedule. Have an individualized space for studying. This will keep you focused. Connect to friends with shared courses and see if working together online keeps you motivated and connected.

Boredom and social isolation can often lead to rumination and worry. You can start a new hobby, such as painting, gardening, baking or doing a puzzle to keep our brains active. Or even start to learn a new language or write a book. Or maybe create new ways to access nature. Get some seeds and planting equipment for house planting and growing your own herbs. Research suggests that connecting with nature reduce stress. You can use this space to create more awareness about yourself and your needs.



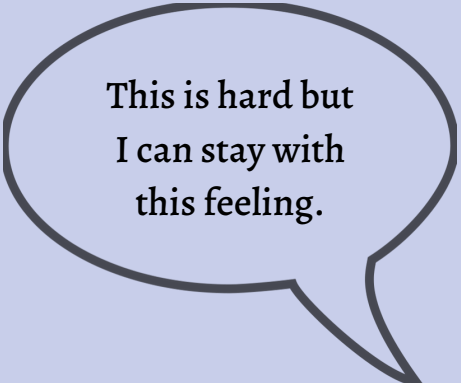


Try to relax:

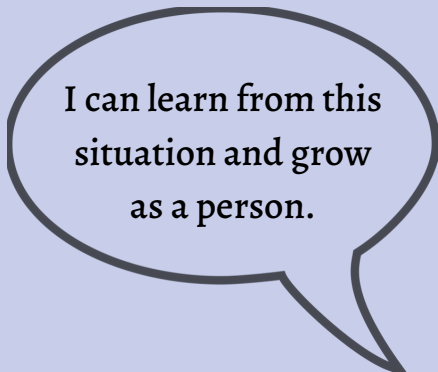
Besides all these, you shouldn't feel guilty for not being active, productive or creative. Try to relax if you don't want to do any of this. It is very difficult to concentrate in the middle of a global pandemic! Reactions to a crisis can appear very different in each person and can occur at any time. Let's not forget that witnessing a pandemic is new to most of us. In new and uncertain situations, our body and mind need some time to figure out what is going on. So, it is quite natural to have unexpected emotional reactions.

Be kind to yourself. Mentally, you may not be in the same point with others to do creative art works, learn a language or do workout. That's fine, give yourself some time to adjust this situation. It's also okay to spend a day watching all those films on Netflix that you have wanted to watch. Take some time for yourself; listen to podcast, rest and play video games.

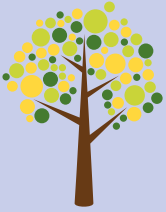
Do not lose hope! Remember that hard times are temporary. The pandemic will be over, and we will be back to our daily life; to our routines, habits and the things we like to do. At the end of this hard process, we will be more resilient. Challenges help us to grow and become stronger.



This is hard but
I can stay with
this feeling.



I can learn from this
situation and grow
as a person.



Reinforce social solidarity:

Studies shows that caring about others benefits our mental well being. Help others by self-isolation, stay at home and keep others safe. You can call those who you know might be isolated and elder family members as they may be feeling lonely or in need.

Acknowledge and appreciate the incredible people working through COVID-19 and the amazing support of front-line medical workers, supermarket staff and delivery workers who are keeping us safe.



Notice positive stories:

It is a natural tendency to watch the news every day and focus on negative. As well, it is a very real threat and our reaction is understandable. But noticing positive stories is important and gives hope for future.

For example;



More than 150,000 people have recovered from COVID-19.



The levels of pollution are down massively in many places. Air pollution in China decreased immensely and Venice's canals are clear, and fishes are visible.



Companies started making hand sanitiser for hospitals for free.



Seek help:

During stressful times and transition periods, it is common to find yourself feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, anxious, nervous, helpless and afraid. Usually we adapt to new situations and overcome these feelings by time and social support, even it is virtual. So, give yourself some time to adjust and adapt. However, when it comes to your mental health, it is important to pay attention to how you feel and to know when you need to ask for help.

- Extreme difficulty to cope with stress and manage your daily life.
- Unusual changes in sleeping or eating patterns, extreme restlessness and irritability, increased impulsivity and hypervigilance.
- Thoughts about harming yourself or others.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms mentioned above, get support from a mental health professional. Reach out to the nearest psychiatrist/psychologist in your city. As a student of Koç University, you can send an e-mail to Koç University Counselling Services (KURES - kures@ku.edu.tr).

If you notice anyone around you experiencing the same symptoms, please refer to a mental health professional as well.

Humans have an amazing ability to adapt new situations and survive. Be kind and thoughtful, look after yourselves and each other. It is important to slow down and remind yourself that this period will be over and strong feelings will fade.