

# FIRST RESPONDERS FIRST



## SUSTAINING YOURSELF DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

### SELF-CARE MICROSTEPS

**Keep a water bottle at your station or in the break room.**

You'll avoid the temptation of soda and other sugary drinks. Plus, refilling your bottle throughout the day will provide you with much-needed micro-moments of rejuvenation.

**Give yourself permission to sit down — or slow down — when you eat.**

Even a brief pause will help you to reset in the midst of your responsibilities. You'll also feel like you've done something to fuel yourself as you continue helping others.

**Take a short nap, or close your eyes for a few minutes, if you worked an overnight shift or didn't get the sleep you need.**

Resting and recharging for five or 10 minutes will boost your energy to be there for your next patient.

**Each time you walk to your next patient or task, focus on extending your spine.**

Paying attention to your posture as you walk will help you to release stress and tension in your body, and help calm and focus you in preparation for your next patient or task.

**When you're washing your hands, take the 20 seconds to think of three things you are grateful for.**

This will help you lower your risk of viral infection while reinforcing a more positive mindset.

**If you catch yourself saying you're unable to practice self-care, pause and choose a new mindset.**

There's nothing selfish about taking care of your basic needs. Per Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration guidelines, it's essential to recognize that your stress management must come first. Shift your self-talk to something like "When I take care of myself in small ways, I can be my best self to take care of patients."

### MANAGING STRESS MICROSTEPS

**Take a one-minute stretch break whenever you can throughout the day.**

You're already moving a lot during the day and coping with a heavy physical load, but make sure to integrate brief stretch breaks to support your body. Stand up, change positions, stretch — anything to get your blood flowing. You can even lead your fellow workmates in a quick stretch in the break room.

**Set a news and social media cut-off time.**

While being informed can help us feel more prepared in a public health crisis, setting healthy limits to our media consumption can help us have a restorative rest and put the stressful news into perspective.

## **On your break, take a few minutes to go outside.**

Even a short walk outdoors will help you recharge. Outdoor light is crucial for resetting our internal circadian clocks. Vitamin D from sun exposure is also necessary for our body.

## **When you receive a notification that causes stress, pause and focus on inhaling for five seconds and exhaling for five seconds.**

Conscious breathing activates our parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for lowering cortisol and overall stress level.

## **When you're feeling stressed, remind yourself why you became a healthcare worker in the first place.**

If you joined this field because you want to help people, remembering that fact can help you to move through challenging moments with more resilience.

## **Set aside a few minutes of recovery time after a challenging moment.**

Instead of returning immediately to your next patient, if you can, take a short walk or a few minutes of conscious breathing. Consciously building in just a few minutes helps you to collect your thoughts, recharge, and bounce back from any challenges.

## **Listen to a calming or recharging song on shift breaks or after a shift ends.**

This Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration-recommended strategy is a signal to your brain and body that it's safe to relax and unwind.

## **Right now, identify your top "stressor signals" that remind you that your battery is running low.**

Learning how to listen to your own particular signals is an important way to guide your microbreaks throughout your day or your shift. Common signals include rapid heart rate, strong negative feelings, difficulty thinking clearly, unnecessary risk taking, and social conflicts. When you notice your signal, take a brief pause to reset so you can be your best at helping others.

## **Avoid tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.**

When you're feeling particularly stressed, you might be tempted to turn to these substances. Know that they can interfere with your body and mind's vital recuperative processes, which are essential for successfully navigating this moment. Use of these substances can also be harmful to your health.

## **MENTAL WELL-BEING MICROSTEPS**

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### **If you are detached or even numb to people and events around you, pause and focus on your breathing.**

The Veterans Affairs COVID-19 Guidelines emphasize the importance of short breaks to rejuvenate. This brief form of meditation will help you recharge so you can focus on what you can control and foster a sense of resilience and hope.

### **When you feel overwhelmed, focus on your breathing instead of reaching for your phone.**

We often use our phones to distract us from challenging moments, but this often leaves us more stressed and more disconnected from what matters most. Allow yourself a moment to turn inward instead and focus on your breathing.

**If you find yourself judging your emotions or responses around the pandemic, remind yourself that they are normal and justified.**

Studies have found that pathologizing your responses by viewing them as “something wrong with you for reacting so strongly” actually increases your anxiety. Instead, say something to yourself like, “You are going through a crisis, and you are reacting in a normal way to an abnormal situation.”

**When you feel overwhelmed by a problem you face at work, identify the smallest possible step you can take to address it.**

As you face incredibly complex challenges, practice breaking them down into small, manageable steps by asking yourself, “What’s the smallest step forward I can take in this moment?” This increases your sense of control and self-efficacy.

## CONNECTION MICROSTEPS

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**Find a workmate who makes you feel safe and try to briefly connect with them each day.**

This might be a friend, your supervisor, or simply a colleague with a particularly grounding presence. When you feel upset or stressed, it’s important to share your emotions with someone you trust.

**If a fellow healthcare or public health worker shares that they are suffering, show your concern by simply listening.**

Research on “invisible support” shows that people benefit more from emotional support when they don’t realize they’re receiving it. Instead of asking “how can I solve this person’s problem?”, focus on “How can I be there for them in this moment?”

**At the end of your shift, take five minutes to unwind. This “buffer time” helps you release stress that’s built up from the shift.**

Taking a few conscious breaths, reading an article, or watching a video that has nothing to do with the crisis will help you be your best self after work.

**Once each day, compliment or thank a coworker for their contribution.**

When you’re on the front lines facing unbelievable pressures every day, it’s easy to forget to call out positive acts. Taking a few seconds to do so will help to inspire and motivate both you and your colleagues.

**Stay in contact with family and friends.**

However busy you may be at work and even if you are spending long hours at work, find time to check in with someone who matters to you. Even a quick text can give you a sense of connection and support. Ask them how they are doing and don’t hesitate to tell them how you are doing and feeling.