

Neuropsychological Aspects of COVID-19: Call to Action

COVID-19 has unleashed an unprecedented shift in our way of life. Our basic routines, family and social interaction, employment and financial health, and other have been disrupted resulting in our perceived **Loss of Control**.

Our news is filled with statistics detailing the increasing number of persons infected with COVID and those who have died from it. We hear less about the far greater number of persons who beat and survive the infection. The seemingly abrupt and difficult challenge to our basic lives has created a concerning **threat to our psychological health and wellbeing**.

Indeed, as our national and local focus has been on the medical and financial aspects of COVID, we have not yet placed a **priority on our individual and national psychological health**. This has been my concern and I am heartened by the fact that Pew Research, President's Task Force, World Health Organization and other have begun to talk about the psychological consequences of COVID.

Loss of Control:

My concern stems from the fact that perceived control is lost from our physical distancing, loss of employment, loss of typical routine, ominous news of an invisible enemy, and from living with more family members under one roof. This is our new reality, at least for the near future and it is critical we **begin a focus and practice of our psychological health**.

With loss of control, everyone can benefit from knowing that it is **normal** to feel anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, and frustration. It is natural to experience physical symptoms such as headache, GI issues, joint pain and even chest pressure as we may ruminate and feel anxious. It is normal to experience some periods of impatience, irritability, loss of sleep and even development of poor eating habits with increased

sedentary behavior. We are all challenged by these typical reactions to feeling no control.

Regain Self-Control:

Fortunately, our reality of an invisible enemy challenging our psychological health is also an **opportunity** to pause and **regain our sense of control**. This will lead to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are health promoting. Please know your brain is the most brilliant and miraculous system ever designed. It is the epicenter of who you are and carries the blueprint for the rest of the body. You are the only organism on the planet with the ability to be miserable or happy simply from a thought. *Which do you choose?*

Chronic Stress Versus Brain Health:

We are vulnerable at this time to chronic stress that can lead to our feeling as if we are in fight or flight mode all the time. Excessive Cortisol is released into the body that can lead to inflammation, susceptibility to illness, anxiety and depression, cognitive problems, sleep disturbance and other negative symptoms. The **good news** is that we can counter this reaction in our body by following a daily Brain Health Lifestyle® (www.brainhealthctr.com).

Practical Steps for Brain and Psychological Health:

My advice is to generate an internal sense of control by doing the following behaviors:

1. Be informed as education reduces anxiety
2. Develop a routine and follow it
3. Pray and meditate several times daily
4. Focus on eating healthier than you usually do
5. Exercise as you can (25% of blood from each heartbeat goes to brain)
6. Remain social during physical distancing (use technology)
7. Engage in mental stimulating activities
8. Smile and engage humor more often
9. Increase your relationship with God and spiritual health

10. Get enough sleep and rest

Another powerful tool for your psychological health is to engage your brain to release powerful health promoting hormones (e.g., oxytocin) and neurochemicals (e.g., Dopamine, Serotonin) that counter the chronic stress response and place your brain and body in a state of **balance and harmony**. Unleash your brain-body health by doing the following daily:

1. Be Positive
2. Lead with love
3. Kindness
4. Gratitude
5. Compassion
6. Empathy
7. Patience
8. Faith
9. Hope
10. Humility

You Own Your Psychological and Brain Health:

It is critical we on an individual and national level **prioritize our psychological and brain health**. We are all confronted by a significant challenge to our psychological and brain health. COVID-19 is an invisible enemy that preys on the vulnerable, disrupts our identity and way of life, causes financial strain, prevents our physical interaction, and other.

The good news is we are blessed with a brain that is the most powerful system in the universe. We are empowered to overcome COVID-19 by regaining our internal sense of control, by engaging in daily behaviors that reinforce our control, and by thinking and acting in ways that release health promoting hormones and neurochemicals.

By following these tips and staying united against this enemy we will **overcome**. I have no doubt that you and we will win this battle and our **psychological health will be stronger as our spirit is strong**. At times of keen distress, *lead with Love and follow with Kindness*.

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www.brainhealthctr.com