

Wellness Wednesday – April 1st, 2020

Living Your Best in Times of COVID-19

A Summary of Panelists' Thoughts & Tips

Dr. Tony Traboulsee – Neurologist, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Clinic

- How do we best support each other & navigate all of the [COVID-19] information? Too much information can create more stress than necessary
- Emphasized importance of abiding by preventative measures like hand washing, not touching your face, social distancing
- Discussed success of video conferencing for MS-related clinical appointments
 - Silver lining: don't need to commute!

Tony's Tips:

1. Exercise your brain
2. Take advantage of time with pets
3. Get outside as much as you can – fresh air is stimulating
4. Maintain a healthy diet as much as possible. Avoid too much take out, incorporate lots of fruits and veggies
5. Can consider this an opportunity “reset” and develop healthier habits e.g. diet, social connections

Sally Stelling – Physiotherapist

Reasons to continue exercising

- Exercise improves sleep
- Exercise strengthens the immune system
- Increases brain function and memory
- Boosts energy, concentration and focus
- Decreases anxiety and depression

Before you exercise at home...

- Be sure that the space you have chosen is free of clutter, safe and appropriately sized for your routine
- Have a soft mat for floor work and water nearby
- Ideally have a family member nearby or exercising with you
- If you are home alone never try something that is too challenging or difficult. Now is not the time for that!

Sally's Tips for Exercise & Wellness at Home

1. Establish a routine

- Do the same activities around the same time, each day including exercise
- Establishing a routine will help you stick to your plan

2. Take regular breaks from sitting

- Don't sit for too long. Long periods of sitting result in increased low back pain, neck pain and is generally not good for you
- Be sure to take regular breaks from your desk/computer
- When you are sitting remember to sit with a good posture and avoid hunching
- Consider putting a timer on your phone to remind yourself to get up and move around e.g. stretch, do a little dance, go for a walk

3. Put on workout clothes when doing your daily exercise routine

- This places emphasis on the fact that you are now going to do your chosen exercise routine for that day

Sally's Tips Continued

4. Be creative with your exercise

- You may have lost the ability to go to the gym, use machines, weights etc. Use everyday household items like cans of food, jugs of milk as your weights

5. Mix it up

- Be sure to do a variety of exercises – including cardiovascular, strength, endurance, functional movement and flexibility exercises.
- Don't do the same thing everyday
- Consider creating or following an online program for guidance

If you'd like to participate in the Brain Wellness Program's online exercise classes please register at <https://www.bcbrianwellness.ca/exercise>. We will be touch as soon as possible to set up an online assessment and guide you in your exercise programming

Jen Kealy – Registered Nurse, Movement Disorders Clinic

Jen's Sleep Tips

1. Create & stick to a sleep routine

- Go to bed & get up around the same time everyday
- If unable to fall asleep for 20 mins its best to get up and go do something such as reading until you're tired
- Reserve your bed for sleep & sex only. Avoid watching TV in bed
- Create a pre-sleep relaxation ritual. E.g. enjoy a warm bath, do a meditation before bed

2. Create a relaxing, restful environment

- A cool, dark room is best for sleep
- It's worth it to invest in items that will help e.g. comfy comforter, darkening curtains
- For those with Parkinson's disease in particular consider silk or satin PJs & sheets for easy turning in bed, avoid flannel (causes friction)
- If you sleep with a partner consider separate blankets or covers which can make turning easier
- Consider ear plugs if sleeping in a noisy environment
- Avoid screens for at least 1 hour before bed. They emit blue light slowing the release of melatonin needed for sleep

Jen's Tips Continued

3. Be mindful of what & when you're eating, drinking

- Avoid going to bed hungry or too full
- Avoid heavy meals within 3 hours before bed
- Avoid stimulants before bed e.g. nicotine, caffeine
- Avoid alcohol before bed. While it might make you sleepy it can interfere with REM (rapid eye movement) sleep
- Limit fluids 3 hours before bed to avoid waking up needing to use the washroom during the night
- Pay attention to the timing of your medications. If having difficulty sleeping some medications could be to blame e.g. bupropion. Talk to a nurse, physician prior to making any changes to the timing of your meds

4. Limit day-time naps

- If you do nap limit it to 30 min & not past 3 p.m.

5. Include physical activity in daily routine

- Exercise promotes better sleep

Myriame Lyons – Registered Clinical Counsellor

Myriame's Tips for Managing Emotions

1. Detach from what isn't yours

- Many of us are feeling anxious, worried or unsettled. As caring beings, we might take on other people's emotional baggage. This isn't necessarily bad, however in a time where your wellness is paramount, it can be important to check in around the anxiety that you are feeling. Literally ask yourself "who's anxious voice am I hearing? Is it mine, my partner's, my parent's, my friends? The answer can help you detach from carrying unnecessary anxiety. It lightens your load and makes the moment or day more manageable.

2. Isolation will pass

- For some of us this isolation is eerily familiar. You might notice you are disturbed on a different level, where this feeling of isolation comes from past experiences. Ask yourself, what are my experiences with being alone, trapped or isolated? Notice what comes to mind and body. Notice what is asking to be looked at. Can you make space for this experience, this felt memory from the past? And tell yourself that you are here now because you survived then. You re okay. This too will pass.

Myriame's Tips Continued

3. Your anger is valid, get clarity around it

- Anger, just like fear and sadness, is a core emotion. Core emotions are hard-wired impulses that get triggered without our control based on a situation or our environment. Listen to the blood in your arms and hands, notice that energy surge through you. What is it telling you? Are you frustrated that you can't make that trip planned months ago. Are you annoyed at the passerby who isn't respecting social distancing? Are you angry at your family members for not taking better precautions around their health? Allow yourself this moment of anger. As you give permission for anger to exist, you become more informed. You understand why it's there in the first place. Only then do you feel more settled.

4. Play is a welcomed guest

- Before this pandemic you had different priorities. Now that you aren't tasked in the same way, what is it that you've put off doing for so long? Is it learning a new subject or language? Educational institutions are holding free online classes for anyone who's interested. Is it picking up your crochet or sorting your tools? Is it learning a new dance? Welcome this creative and imaginative energy into your life. Let it steer you to play!

5. Receive a butterfly hug to calm yourself

- Cross and place your hands on your upper chest or arms. Notice the weight of your hands.
- Breathe.
- Gently tap one hand after the other on your upper chest or arms. Continue tapping for at least 30 seconds.
- Keep tapping until you feel settled and more calm. Repeat as needed.

Elaine Book – Social Worker, Movement Disorders Clinic

Elaine's Wellness Tips

1. Remember that it's okay to not be okay

- Feelings of grief and loss about work, income, activities, hobbies, social connections. Perhaps fear about being sick or how long this will last. Remember that this is temporary
- A few strategies
 - Try designated worry time
 - Try journaling – expressing feelings and strong emotions can help to diminish the strong hold they may have on you. Drawing or writing can lessen this power. Can use prompts such as “what worried me today?” or “what made me smile today?”
 - Consider the book “52 Lists for Happiness”, a journaling book with weekly prompts

2. Re-frame

- Re-frame the request to isolate as something you can do to be a part of the solution. Isolating is something you can do to control the situation. We are all playing a part and that can be empowering
- Having control over a situation is critical when working through grief and loss

Elaine's Tips Continued

3. Focus on what you can do

- Focus on what you can do during this time rather than what you can't do
- For example make a drawing, go for a walk, listen to music, make phone calls, write letters, cook, read, do a puzzle
- Consider making an "I can map" with a list of all of the things you can do. Place it somewhere you'll see on a daily basis such as on your fridge

4. Acknowledge relationship strain

- There may be challenges associated with spending much more time than usual with each other
- Give everyone the benefit of the doubt. Being isolated for long periods can bring out the worst in everyone. We will all have moments that we're not at our best
- Its important to move with grace through blow ups, to not show up to every argument you're invited to and to not hold grudges. Everyone is doing the best they can to make it through this
- Try putting your loved one, roommate etc. on a pedestal: make a list of their best qualities, what you love about them
- Try making a bucket list of things you want to do with them once this is all over. Create a plan for one thing on your list
- Try making a love map, by John Gottman, to get to know each other. Encourages sharing things such as your favourite foods

5. Find or put meaning & joy into your day

- Consider what brings you joy. E.g. plan a meal for someone else, set & accomplish small goals, get creative

Elaine's Recommended Article:

“That Discomfort You’re Feeling is Grief”, an interview with grief expert David Kessler

Find it here:

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

A Few More Suggestions

1. Create a mission statement for yourself during this time
 - A 1-2 sentence motto of what's most important to you that guides decision-making and can help establish goals
2. Practice gratitude
 - Try listings a few things each day that you were grateful for or enjoyed that day e.g. "I really enjoyed the beautiful pink roses I saw on my walk today", "I'm grateful for the virtual catch up I had with X today "
3. Check out the '**COVID-19 Wellness Activity Booklet**' - Developed by Kamal (Social worker) and Lauren (Occupational Therapist) at UBC
 - Find it here: <https://www.bcbrainwellness.ca/resources-2>
 - Includes mental health worksheets, breathing & relaxation exercises, games

Current Program Offerings

We're offering the following free wellness programming to fit your lifestyle:

- Brain Wellness Book Club
- Exercise for Brain Wellness
- Living your Best With a Chronic Condition
- Art for Wellness
- Yoga for Mind and Body
- Music & Motion
- Mindfulness
- Talk Café, coming soon

Sign Up For Classes:

<https://www.bcbrainwellness.ca/current-programs>

And don't forget to check out our blog posts:

<https://www.bcbrainwellness.ca/blog>

Thank you for taking
the time to join us!

From all of us at the BC Brain Wellness Program we wish you and your loved ones all of the best during this challenging time