

What to Do for Yourself: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself During Stressful Times*

1) Stop, breathe, and tell yourself “This is hard and I will get through it one step at a time.”

During an unexpected event or crisis, we are faced with dealing with a new reality and it takes time to incorporate what happened into our everyday lives. Identify the steps you need to take first, write them down, and focus on each step one at a time to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Remember you can only do one thing at a time, so help yourself focus exclusively on that one thing.

2) Acknowledge to yourself what you are feeling.

All feelings are normal. Accept whatever you are feeling. Once you recognize, name, and accept your feelings, you may feel less out of control. You can then find a comfortable place to express your feelings. During periods of extreme stress and grief, it is very hard to hold back your feelings, particularly your tears and anger. This is normal, so describe this as grieving or sadness or anger. You are not falling apart, you are grieving or feeling angry-sadness. It is important during this time of intense feelings to own your feelings and not hurt yourself or lash out at someone else.

3) Find someone who listens and is accepting.

You don't need advice. You need to be heard. Sharing your story is how you begin to accept whatever happened and integrate it into your new reality. It may be that you need to let go of your expectations of how things should be. Talking about your feelings and beliefs is the beginning of that process.

4) Maintain your normal routine as much as possible.

Familiar activities like making everyday decisions, getting dressed, doing dishes, or going to work, for example, may give you a sense of control and feels comforting. Be realistic with what you can do and remember that everything will take you longer than usual to complete. Avoid making major decisions based on the stress you feel right now.

5) Allow plenty of time for a task.

During periods of extreme stress, prolonged stress or after a crisis, your ability to concentrate and focus on tasks is diminished. It will take time for your concentration to return, and you will not be as productive as you normally are. Accept how much you can do right now and recognize it will not be this way forever. Give yourself extra time and be gentle and accepting of yourself and what you can do, especially when it comes to preparing course materials and grading student work. Be patient with yourself and give yourself extra time for these instructional activities.

6) Take good care of yourself.

Remember to:

- **Get enough rest and sleep.** Sleep is how our body heals and strengthens our immune system. Consider your normal sleep patterns and ensure you aren't sleeping significantly more or less than usual. If you are having difficulty sleeping, listening to peaceful, slow music and/or do progressive relaxation just before you go to sleep. If you have a lot of tasks on your mind, write a to-do list for the next day before trying to go to bed.
- **Eat regularly and make healthy choices.** Skipping meals, particularly breakfast, contributes to fatigue, mood swings, and poor concentration. Be mindful of how your mood may be affecting your dietary decisions, and try to stick with your normal routine.
- **Know your limits and when you need to let go.** Some problems are beyond our control. If something cannot be changed, work at accepting it for what it is. Resist the urge to fix the unfixable or try to control the uncontrollable. Sometimes a mantra helps: "It is what it is, I just need to accept it." For things within your control, remember that change takes time. If you are holding on and need to let go, journal about what you are feeling.
- **Identify or create a nurturing place in your home.** A rocking chair, a nice view, and soothing music are important components to a nurturing place. Twenty minutes of rocking in a rocking chair reduces both your physical pain and anxiety. It is like giving yourself a hug. Music and nature sounds nurture our being and lifts our spirits.
- **Practice relaxation or meditation.** Go to your nurturing place and listen to guided relaxation tapes. Time spent in meditation or prayer allows your mind and body to slow down and let go of the stress. Take a mental vacation in the midst of stress by relaxing your body, shutting your eyes and visualizing yourself in your favorite vacation spot or quiet haven.
- **Moderate your use of social media.** Be mindful of the effects of engaging with particular platforms. Are you able to use them to find connection, community, and support, or are they creating more stress and anxiety at this time? If the latter is true, seek healthier alternatives like meditation, time with friends, reading, movies, or exercise.

Additional Resources

For UNC employees, the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) has counseling support available online through GuidanceConnect. Log on to guidanceresources.com with a username and password or register with Web ID: TARHEELS. You may also call 877-314-5841 to make an appointment with a counselor. Support is free and confidential.

Explore additional support for [Well-Being](#) available through UNC's [Faculty Support Hub](#).
