



# A Guide for Primary Care Providers for Supporting Patients in Distress During COVID-19

- \* **Normalize and validate**
  - Stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, and anger are all natural responses to difficult situations
  - Some anxiety and fear is normal during times like these
  - Common stressors include: fears of infection, frustration and boredom, disrupted routines, loss of regular wellness activities and supports, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, increased responsibilities, employment difficulties, financial problems, loss and grief
- \* **Emphasize the need to prioritize self-care**
  - **Physical:** Eat healthy, exercise regularly, get outside if you can, get plenty of sleep, avoid substances
  - **Social connection:** Stay connected with friends and family, reach out to others for support
  - **"Unplug" and engage in healthy activities:** Schedule time for specific wellness activities (see overleaf for examples)
    - Activating activities that generate a sense of pleasure and achievement
    - Soothing activities that decrease distress and increase relaxation
  - **Routine:** Usual routines have likely been disrupted. Develop and stick to a new routine that includes the above self-care activities
- \* **Ask about information consumption**
  - Emphasize the importance of getting information from reliable sources (e.g., [gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus](http://gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus), Health Canada ([Canada.ca/coronavirus](http://Canada.ca/coronavirus)), WHO, reliable news sources)
  - Avoid unfamiliar websites, discussion groups where people post information from non-credible sources; Be wary of what is posted on social media
  - Avoid too much exposure to news and social media: limit checking the news to once per day and don't spend too much time reading news stories
    - Even though things are shifting rapidly, daily changes are not likely to affect how you manage your risk
- \* **Highlight the need to watch out for "what if" thinking**
  - In stressful situations, people often overestimate how bad the situation can get, but underestimate how well they will be able to cope
  - Remember that you are resilient and don't underestimate yourself and your ability to cope!
- \* **Suggest focusing on what they can control**
  - It's important to accept that many things are outside of your control, and it's more helpful to focus on what you can control
- \* **Remind your patients to be kind to themselves**
  - Don't beat yourself up if you don't do all these things every day
  - It takes some time to develop new habits and feel their benefits
- \* **Provide online self-help resources**
  - Wellness Together Canada: [ca.portal.gs](http://ca.portal.gs)
  - Anxiety Canada: [anxietycanada.com](http://anxietycanada.com)
  - Coping with Coronavirus: [copingwithcoronavirus.co.uk](http://copingwithcoronavirus.co.uk)
  - Centre for Clinical Interventions: [cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au)
- \* **Encourage patients to seek help when needed**
  - AbilitiCBT: [manitoba.ca/covid19/bewell](http://manitoba.ca/covid19/bewell)
  - Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba (ADAM) support line: 204-925-0040
  - Provide crisis resources



## Example Wellness Activities

*Make your own personalized wellness list—a list of activities that make you feel good. Below are just some examples—something that is a wellness activity for one person may not necessarily be a wellness activity for another person.*

### Activating Activities

- Exercise
- Walk
- Cleaning
- Gardening
- Cooking
- Call a friend
- Books/movies/music that create a different emotion
- Games
- Puzzles
- Do something thoughtful
- Make something for someone
- Take an online class
- Go outside and play with your pet
- Read something funny (e.g. comics)
- Play a virtual game with a friend
- Create something (art, writing, online blog, ...)
- Research an interesting topic
- Do a virtual tour of a museum or art gallery
- Connect with an online special interest group
- Call a family member you haven't spoken to in while
- Work on your car, truck, or bicycle
- Dance to or sing along with loud music
- Make a playlist of happy songs
- Take photographs
- Learn a new language
- Play a game with your family members
- Crafts (e.g., knitting, sewing, jewelry making)
- Build something (electronics, shelving, ...)
- Write a letter to a friend or family member
- Play an instrument
- Hobbies
- Make a to-do list
- Complete a task

### Soothing Activities

- Breathe deeply
- Release tension from the body
- Drink tea
- Light a candle
- Practice mindfulness
- Sit outside
- Enjoy the sounds of nature
- Be aware of sounds and let them come and go
- Look out the window
- Use favourite lotion or perfume
- Enjoy smells of nature
- Bubble bath
- Shower
- Pet an animal
- Soak feet
- Do nails
- Read
- Imagine a relaxing scene/safe space
- Imagine yourself coping/distress passing
- Read/think about spiritual values
- Gratitude/think about positive aspects of your life
- Listen to relaxation audio
- Take a break
- Use coping statements (e.g. these feelings will pass)
- Yoga/stretching
- Go outside and watch the clouds
- Eat a small treat
- Meditate
- Write or draw things you like about yourself
- Make a list of 10 things you're good at
- Journaling
- Hug a family member
- Art, crafts, creative activities



# My Wellness Plan

## Things I need to do every day to maintain my wellness:

What are the things that help you feel good that are important for you to remember to do every day?

*Examples: Go to bed & wake up at the same time, get dressed, get outside, talk to someone, take breaks, eat regularly, ...*

## Things I should think about doing once in a while:

What are the things that you don't need to do every day, but you should remember to do more regularly?

*Examples: Call a friend or family member, hobbies, exercise, ...*

## Things I should avoid doing:

What are some things you tend to do to when experiencing difficult emotions that are not really that helpful?

*Examples: Alcohol/substances, isolating from social connection, focusing on negative thoughts, ...*

## My Early Warning Signs:

What are some signs that you are experiencing elevated levels of distress and may need to pay more attention to your wellness?

*Examples: Difficulty sleeping, irritable, lack of energy, snapping at people, drinking more alcohol, eating more unhealthy foods, ...*

## Improving Distress Action Plan:

What are some specific things I can do when I am feeling distressed? Is there a specific order in which I should do these things?

*Examples: Make sure I am sticking to my daily wellness activities, take a break, relaxation exercises, call a friend, ...*

## Crisis Action Plan:

What are some specific things I should do if I'm experiencing a mental health crisis?

*Examples: Call a friend, call a crisis line (include specific number), call the Mobile Crisis Service (204940-1781), go to the Crisis Response Centre, ...*