

Sober Strategies for Coping at Home

Health care professionals are under intense pressure right now. Self-care and the ability to decompress after a stressful shift are paramount to maintaining healthy functioning. And yet, many of the outlets we may typically use to regain balance after a long day at work may not be available to us right now. Most of us who work in health care have adopted some kind of routine that helps us separate work stress from home life. For some, it's going to the gym, enjoying a meal at a favorite local restaurant, or spending time at places like an arcade, the zoo or a bowling alley. Still others enjoy attending the theater, hosting a game night with friends or taking a vacation.

Conversely, when we're stressed and bored at home with fewer obvious ways to reconnect with the things that rejuvenate us, bring joy and restore our energy, we may find ourselves casting about for a convenient distraction. Sometimes we just need some distance from the intensity of the workday, and it's simply more difficult to accomplish that right now.

Increased stress paired with fewer outlets to relieve that stress puts us at greater risk for increased substance use. While having an occasional drink may be a nice treat for some, if it starts to become the go-to strategy for coping, we could be headed down a dangerous path.

So, what else is there that could help with stress relief when so many aspects of our usual self-care routines have been (temporarily) stripped away?

- **Take a moment to stop and breathe after your shift.**
 - Inhale deeply, exhale slowly.
 - Close your eyes and repeat the mantra, "My work is done for today."
- **Get some mental separation between work life and home life.**
 - Try listening to your favorite music or a podcast that has nothing to do with health care or COVID-19 on your way home.
 - Avoid reading or listening to the news right away.
 - Limit your engagement with social media platforms.
- **Avoid rehashing every detail of your day with others when you get home.**
 - While it's important to let others know about what you're going through on the front lines of this pandemic, replaying each detail of what happened during your shift won't help.
 - Instead, try shifting your focus to describing how what's been happening is impacting you; let others know how you're feeling, and ask for the support you need from them.
- **Avoid social isolation**
 - If you live with others, ask them to tell you about something good that happened.
 - If you live alone, video chat with a friend or family member.
 - If you have a pet, spend some time playing with them.

- **Take an inventory of your favorite hobbies and schedule some time with yourself to engage in them—even if you're tired, even if it's just for 15 minutes.**
 - If some of your hobbies aren't available to you right now, what might be the next best thing?
- **Engage with material (art, music, TV, movies, books, etc.) that will help your nervous system return to its natural “rest and digest” state.**
 - Choose a show on your favorite video-streaming platform that is hopeful, funny, familiar or fascinating. Avoid anything too dark, frightening or serious right now—you're getting enough drama at work, right?!
 - Read a book just for fun.
 - Yoga may help you stretch sore muscles and quiet any racing thoughts.
- **Take the time to cook a tasty, nutritious meal.**
 - Next, enjoy eating it.
- **Spend some time expressing yourself through art.**
 - Drawing, painting, journaling, dancing, making music—it doesn't matter, as long as it's fun!
- **Both your body and your mind need some extra rest right now. Nurture a healthy sleep hygiene routine.**
 - Limit screen time before bed.
 - Make your bedroom dark, cool and quiet.
 - Set a time to start winding down for the day and stick to it.
- **If you do find yourself wanting to cut back or discontinue your use of substances, try a virtual sober support meeting.**
 - Alcoholics Anonymous
 - Find a virtual meeting at aa-intergroup.org
 - SMART Recovery (Self-Management and Recovery Training)
 - Find a virtual meeting at smartrecovery.org/coronavirus