



# Message From Psych Health

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## Coronavirus pandemic: Tips to win the ultimate psychological test of mettle, spirit

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The coronavirus pandemic is quickly becoming society's ultimate psychological test. With that in mind, the psychological health staff would like to underscore a few key points as we transition into our new "normal."

One common emotion that people are experiencing – but it may not be obvious – is grief. People often subconsciously feel grief over the loss of routines, certainty and the perception of safety and well-being. Mental health experts agree there are steps we can take to ease anxiety and give an individual a better sense of control.

I know some of this advice is obvious but worth repeating:

### How to Combat Emotional Stress

**1. Sleep well** -- Try to stay on a regular sleep schedule. Keep the room dark and free of distractions. Consider using a sleep app such as Sleep Cycle to record your sleep. It's fun to track.

If you notice your mind focusing on anything but sleep, prioritize **BREATHING**. I know it sounds funny, but try it. Do the 4-7-8 drill. Empty your lungs. Breathe in quietly through your nose for four seconds. Hold the breath for a count of seven seconds. Exhale forcefully through the mouth, pursing the lips and making a "whoosh" sound, for eight seconds. Repeat the cycle up to 4 times.

**2. Eat regularly** – No, we are not suggesting you eat until you gorge! But be kind to yourself and buy some of your favorite comfort foods. Attempt to get some fruit and vegetables daily, too. Whenever possible, do your best to eat balanced meals.

**3. Stay hydrated** – There is no official, precise amount of water that is best. Some recommend 8-10 glasses or approximately two liters per day. Dehydration can certainly affect our mood. Drinking plenty of water keeps our brain from having to struggle against the effects of dehydration, allowing us to think clearly. Drinking enough water is good for our mental, emotional, and physical health. If you're thirsty, take the time to drink water to drink. **Do daily reminders on your phone: "Drink water, beat the heat, drill sergeant, beat the heat!"**

**4. Exercise** -- People who exercise regularly often say the effort gives them an enormous sense of well-being. They feel energetic throughout the day, sleep well at night, feel relaxed, and are positive about their lives. Exercise is a powerful medicine for many common mental health challenges. There are now many gyms and fitness instructors who are giving free classes daily online. These classes range from boot camp-style classes to Zumba. Many are live on Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. Get up and PT! For those leaders blessed with a love of fitness, lead a live stream exercise class for your Soldiers. Make it fun and enjoyable!

**5. Stay Connected** -- Socializing is fantastic for your mind and body. We are social animals by nature, so we tend to function better when we're in a community and interacting with others. You don't have to be a social butterfly to recognize the benefits of connecting with others.

There are so many ways to stay connected nowadays! Some ideas include a virtual Netflix group movie viewing party, a scheduled lunch on FaceTime, or an old-fashioned group chat.

When we take care of life's basics, we tend to manage life with a clear mind.

## Make A Plan

Once the basics of life are in order, it's time to get ahead of the game and thrive! A set strategy for day to day living is a form of mental therapy. Now is the time to start establishing healthy habits.

Wake up and start your day with exercise and fresh air if possible. People feeling overwhelmed with constant news might should consider decreasing their amount of exposure to troubling news on fatality rates and growing numbers of sick people. Give yourself a time limit on the news; perhaps just 30 minutes per day. Try to keep your reading and sharing of pandemic news articles to 1-2 articles per day.

Social distancing doesn't have to result in extreme loneliness and a feeling of isolation. People at home can set up group chats via FaceTime or Zoom. Have a lunch date via FaceTime. We need to find ways to stay connected while maintaining our six feet of distance!

Keep vulnerable people in mind. Look out for your grandparents or family members who may not be able to leave home because of their circumstances. Now is the time to unite and look out for each other.

Check to make sure single Soldiers are doing well. People with mental illness can be vulnerable, especially during a time of uncertainty. Those with anxiety disorders may feel an increased amount of distrust in those around them. A lack of social engagements and routine can increase those symptoms.

People with mental health issues should make a plan to continue with their treatment and maybe join a support group. Those on medications should consider talking to their psychiatrist about their dosage.

This pandemic is undoubtedly leaving the entire country in a depressed state. Everyone wants to know: When can I go to my friend's wedding? When can I go vacation? When can I dance again? The entire nation has temporarily lost our ability to plan and strive for our collective goals. Depression is a feeling of hopelessness for the future and you are definitely not alone if you detect your own feelings of mild depression.

Distress reactions to uncertainty include: the inability to fall sleep, difficulty concentrating and a feeling of being unsafe. Some people will be quick to anger and blame others for difficult situations. Others will seek social isolation. Uncertainty may also lead to increased risky behavior including the excessive use of alcohol or other substances.

It's difficult to predict how any one individual will cope with uncertainty. Some people will work long hours while other will display apathy toward their job and tasks. Be aware of how you cope individually and aim to cope in the healthiest way possible in your personal situation.

What our staff has noticed, though, is that when there is a crisis in Nevada, we see people uniting, taking care of loved ones and strangers, and finding ways to motivate each other. No one knows how long the pandemic will continue, but we are all Service Members! We urge everyone to Adapt and Overcome. We got this together!

If you have tried some of our advice and your anxiety or depression has not subsided, please reach out to your psychological health staff. We have plenty of resources available to assist you. For information, call Army Guard DPH Tara Pushkin at 702-856-4936, Army Guard DPH Jeremy Trapp at 775-887-7210 or Air Guard DPH Allison Pratte 775-788-9307.

Chaplain Donald Crandell (775) 788-4651 Nevada National Guard Family Program 1-833-251-8350  
Chaplain Troy Dandrea (702) 856-4990

VA App Store <https://www.mobile.va.gov/appstore/mental-health>

Military Crisis Line 1-800 273-8255 Press 1 or Text 838255



