

Special COVID-19 Edition

Episode #1: WorkWell: Managing Stress and Anxiety during uncertain times

Colleagues, the uncertainty we're experiencing in the face of the global response to COVID-19, has many of us feeling stressed and anxious – there seem to be more questions than answers. Please know that those feelings are completely normal.

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher – Deloitte US Chief Well-being Officer, and I'm here today to provide you with information you can use to help you cope and build your resilience. As our work, family, and social lives continue to be disrupted it's important to recognize that our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

Psychologists have noted that the inability to control a situation, especially when we've HAD control or THINK we should have control, can create a major source of anxiety. This, in turn, can greatly add to our stress levels.

The good news is that there are things we can do to help take care of our mental health, especially when it comes to dealing with stress and negative emotions. In fact, one of the most important first steps is to focus on those things you CAN control.

Gather **just** the key facts to remain safe and avoid ruminating on information that is out of your control. Even if it's simply limiting how much time you spend watching the news – for me personally, I try to balance the need-to-know information with uplifting content. You may also want to monitor your caffeine, nicotine and alcohol intake.

We all react to stress differently and it's important not to ignore it.

Similarly, our emotions and how we experience them can have a substantial impact on our actions and decision-making. That's why it's important to recognize the energy-draining effects of strong negative emotions and take steps to manage them.

These are some of my favorite tips for managing stress and event-based anxiety:

• First, take a joy break (or multiple small breaks) to replenish your energy. Activities like watching a funny video, listening to your favorite song, or reading a light-hearted story can help you refocus.

- Take a few deep breaths inhale for 5 seconds, hold for 3 seconds and exhale for 5 seconds. Return to this practice anytime you feel overwhelmed.
- Physical activity can help boost your immune system, help you manage stress and improve your mood. Keeping active by moving around or stretching while on a call can also help. You can still avoid crowds AND get some fresh air by taking a walk outside.
- Make sure you're getting enough sleep. 7-9 hours each night is recommended to restore brain chemistry and heal your body. If you have problems falling or staying asleep, try creating a bedtime ritual that could include a warm bath, journaling or meditation.

Other ideas include:

- Practicing gratitude I have been thinking about 3-5 things I am grateful for each time I wash my hands, but you can also start a gratitude journal or jar with family or friends
- Spreading digital acts of kindness. We need to be there for each other, even from a distance. Whether it's a supportive text reminder, a call, or a funny meme. You don't have to physically present with others to show you care.
- Starting an at home project you have been wanting to do, a book you have been wanting to read, or an online course you have been wanting to take. Structure time each day to dive into something you are passionate about.

If your stress or anxiety becomes persistent, intense, and interferes with your ability to engage in daily activities, please reach out to your personal physician or local medical provider. Please know that while everyone's experience is unique, you're not going through this alone.

I hope you found these well-being strategies helpful. Until next time, stay well.