7 Steps to Reduce Pandemic Fatigue

After months of dealing with the fallout from COVID-19, many people have pandemic fatigue. On July 24, 2020, chief public health officer warned of pandemic fatigue as COVID-19 cases began surging among young people (who accounted for 60% of new cases reported that week).

What is pandemic fatigue?

According to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), it is a "very real feeling of exhaustion stemming from the effects of the novel coronavirus on your life – from stay-at-home orders to the fear of getting ill to losing jobs." It is also, as per the UCLA, a very normal feeling – that of being burnt out.

Photo courtesy of the University of Arizona, retrieved from PinalCentral.com

Pandemic fatigue is a result of having to manage intense emotions on a consistent basis – in this case, day in and day out. Stemmed from common feelings of fear, anxiety, loneliness and hopelessness, it can be a very exhausting time for many of us. You might also feel helpless, sad, worried, frustrated and irritable.

The side effects of these feelings can take a toll on our physical and mental health:

- Eating or sleeping more or less than usual
- Having trouble focusing (i.e. "brain fog")
- Feeling edgy or nervous
- Being snappy, or quick to argue with others
- Lacking motivation
- Inability to stop racing thoughts
- Withdrawal from others

While adapting to the increased uncertainty of the pandemic may be challenging, it is essential to pay attention to your emotional and physical needs.

Healthy Ways to Cope

Take these 7 steps to help renew your energy and feel more in control:

1 **Take care of your body.** When you are wrapped up in the world at large, it is easy to forget about your body. Ensure you are getting enough sleep and maintaining a nutritious diet. Exercising every day is important. These things will boost your energy, lift your mood, and strengthen your immune system.

2 **Limit your news intake.** While it is good to stay up-to-date on COVID-19, too much news overloads your negative emotions and saps your energy. Take a break from the news for a day or two, and see if you feel better. Be sure to limit your time spent on the news to once a day or an hour or less, and choose accurate sources of information.

3 **Lower your stress.** While it sounds "easier said than done", focusing on activities that are calming or provide joy can lower your stress level (whether it's cooking a fancy meal, bird watching, or meditating). Anything that offers stress relief can be helpful. Consider breathing exercises, yoga, nature walks, reading, or watching a comedy.

4 **Connect with others.** Humans are social creatures by nature, and being alone and feeling isolated can be stressful. While limiting physical contact is necessary, it is crucial to remain connected to others. Try making a phone or video call, writing a letter, taking a live class online, or attending online community or religious services.

5 **Accept your feelings.** Challenging situations invoke a mixture of emotions, but bottling them up and ignoring them does not make them go away. Instead, acknowledge and name your feelings. Allow yourself to have them. Then – refocus your mind and energy on the things you can do to feel better. If your feelings are overwhelming or all-consuming, and getting in the way of your daily activities, then reach out to a healthcare provider. Protecting emotional health is just as important as caring for yourself physically.

6 **Try positive self-talk.** Sometimes fear and anxiety can make our minds leap to the worst scenario, even if it is the most unlikely one. You might become consumed by "what if" thoughts. Try replacing your negative thoughts with more realistic statements – for instance, replace thoughts about acquiring COVID-19 with thoughts about what you're doing to stay safe.

7 **Create new traditions.** Creativity can usher in more joy. New traditions might become something fun to look forward to, and you might even decide to continue them when the pandemic has passed. You might set aside Sunday nights for self-care, focus on a hobby such as playing guitar or scrapbooking, doing something for your body (facial, hot shower, or a long run). Try making every Friday a family movie night, or have a backyard picnic every Saturday, or even organize a video-call with friends as a mid-week check-in.