

Coping with Covid-19 AND an Eating Disorder

BUILDING RESILIENCY

Having a hard time through Covid-19 is completely valid; the world may feel out of control and anxiety is normal with uncertainty. The reality is that there have always been things that are uncertain or out of our control, but there are also things that remain within our control even during a pandemic. It is helpful to adjust expectations but also to keep the big picture in your mind.

The big picture is that recovery and wellness matter –this was true before Covid-19 and it remains true now. If the thought has crossed your mind that “the world is a mess, why bother?”, then here is something to consider.

The pandemic has caused a rapid shift in priorities for most of us. The fact is that eating disorders (ED) steal LIFE – relationships, sense of pride, fulfillment and contentment, and the list goes on. It’s clear more than ever that the future cannot be predicted or taken for granted, BUT this period of time can be reframed as an opportunity to make sure life is different on the other side of COVID-19.

Start by reflecting on what holds real meaning for you. Whatever that is for you. For example:

1. Connecting with loved ones
2. A leisurely morning stroll
3. Feeling sun on your face
4. Tasting and enjoying food
5. Feeling good about who you are and what you do

Recovery allows access to the most precious parts of what it can mean to be alive. It may be hard to believe but in the future, you will be grateful for your resilience now.

The reality is that there are some new obstacles.

- Grocery shopping is already hard. Now food may be less accessible with long waits in line, or for a delivery service, and preferred foods may not be available at all. This may lead to a desire to stock up and keep more food at home; or to avoid grocery shopping altogether which could escalate urges and symptoms.
- In-person meal support may have ended.
- There is heightened stress, disrupted routines, and loss of structure, which is challenging.
- Current physical distancing measures prevent significant supports that you may have relied on, and the ED can thrive in isolation.

Resiliency is generally thought of as a positive adaptation after a stressful or adverse situation. What are some helpful things that you can do right now to increase your capacity for coping and adapting?

STRATEGIES

- Accept your feelings and know that you are not alone. There is no normal for an unprecedented time that none of us has dealt with before.
- Create routine – get up, get dressed and do something daily that feels productive or pleasurable – and ensure mealtimes are included in this routine. However, do not put too much pressure on yourself to get many things done; being in a pandemic is exhausting. It is also ok to watch Netflix and rest.
- Structuring your days with 3 meals and 2-3 snacks gives you a clear idea of when the next meal will be. Structure and regular eating help to regulate satiety and hunger cues, reduces binge eating and undereating, and additionally, manages food supply better on a decreased number of shopping trips.
- Plan meals that are satisfying physically and emotionally; staying well-nourished helps stabilize blood sugar levels, mood and capacity for emotional coping.

- Find activities that bring joy and/or develop a skill; engaging in this can help prevent preoccupation with negative thinking.
- Try to participate in as many former life activities as possible- see if there is an online equivalent. For example: Broadway shows, new movies, museum tours, classes etc. may be available online.
- Give yourself permission to mourn the losses and experience the full range of your feelings. Some people have had cancelled milestones in their lives- proms, graduations or weddings. There are job losses and new, or more pressing financial concerns. Some people have ill family members or friends, or worry about people close to them in essential work. All of these issues matter and have impact and it is important to acknowledge this and talk about it.
- Ask for help- there are many virtual resources- individual therapy, group support as well as tips and information about how to stay well during this time.
- Stay connected rather than isolated. This shifts the environment to a less ED friendly climate.
- Resist negative crowd mentality
- Get spiritual if that is helpful for you.
- Stay in the moment rather than in the past or future. Mindfulness practice can help with this.

COVID-19 AND MEAL PLANNING



How can I follow a meal plan during the pandemic?

- Eat three meals and two to three snacks per day
- Try to stick to regular meal times and duration
- Use the plate model for portioning and include 1/3 starch, 1/3 protein and 1/3 vegetables at meals
- Drink fluids to stay hydrated during and in between each snack and meal
- Make a meal plan for a week in advance in order to pre-plan meals and avoid unnecessary trips to the grocery store
- Consider ordering groceries online or ordering in food from a restaurant
- You might want to try a meal kit delivery service that also helps to cut down on trips to the grocery store
- Try to shop for food that will provide meals and snacks for at least one week. If you are worried about keeping extra food in the house, purchase what you need for the week or buy individual portions vs bulk
- avoid panic buying or stocking up unnecessarily on any one item
- Consider having a meal with a supportive family member or friend virtually, as a form of support and/or distraction

Foods that have longer storage include:

- Frozen fruits and vegetables
- Frozen meats, fish and whole meals
- Dried and canned goods
- Sliced bread and baked goods can be frozen



- Snack foods such as dried fruits, nuts and seeds, granola bars, chips etc.

SOME FOOD RELATED QUESTIONS AND COVID-19

1. Q. Are there specific foods or nutrients I could consume in addition to eating a regular diet in order to prevent COVID-19?

A. Although there are no specific foods, dietary supplements or natural health products to prevent an infection, eating a regular diet, along with other helpful behaviors, strengthens your immune system's ability to fight infection. Some of these helpful behaviors might include:

- Grocery shopping once per week or less to limit exposure
- Maintaining good hand washing and sleeping habits
- Staying connected with family, friends and supports
- Practicing self-care, such as mindfulness, restorative yoga, reading etc.
- Trying to get outside when able and safe to do so
- Physical distancing and use of masks when unable to maintain a 6 foot distance from others (this can include grocery stores)

2. Q. Can COVID-19 be spread by eating or touching raw fruits and vegetables?

A. There is no evidence that COVID-19 can be spread by eating or touching raw fruits and vegetables. In preparing to eat fresh or raw fruits and vegetables, it is important to wash and scrub them under cold water before eating.

3. Q. Should I be concerned about storing foods in my cupboard, fridge or freezer?

A. Although, COVID-19 may survive in foods and on surfaces for a few hours to a few days before it dies off, it is not believed that the virus is transmitted by eating contaminated food. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, just recently stated there is no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus at this time. To date, there have been no reported cases of food or food packaging associated with COVID-19. It is recommended to wash your hands before and after putting away and preparing food. If you choose to wipe down food containers, always wash your hands before starting and upon completion.

WHERE CAN I FIND RELIABLE INFORMATION ON COVID-19?

NOTE: be mindful of limiting your exposure to COVID-19 related material, news stories and social media. For example, you may want to view reliable information (some good sources below), once a day or every few days.

Government of Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

Dietitians of Canada:

<https://www.dietitians.ca/>



Public Health Ontario:

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/>

- It is important to receive information from credible, trustworthy sources during this time. Dietitians are a regulated health profession committed to providing evidence-based advice

and information that is tailored to your personal needs and challenges.

- Members of the public are encouraged to follow the advice issued by the Government of Canada and local public health officials.
- Sources: Canadian Nutrition Society, Dietitians of Canada and Government of Canada websites. Sourced April 28 2020.

SUPPORTIVE PHONE APPS (FREE)

Eating Disorder Wellness/Recovery Support

- Recovery Record: eating disorder management
- Rise Up and Recover-an eating disorder monitoring and management tool for anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating, and eating disorders not otherwise specified.

General Mental/Emotional Health Support

- Mindshift CBT-Anxiety Canada
- What's Up? - A Mental Health App

Addiction Wellness/Recovery Support

- Sober Grid
- NOMO-Sobriety Clocks
- WE connect
- Additionally, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (US based) offers virtual recovery resources for substance use and mental illness

<https://www.drugabuse.gov>

COVID-19 SPECIFIC APPS

- Managing your Stress and Anxiety – CAMH
- Canada Covid-19 Support- Government of Canada
- PTSD Coach Canada- Veteran Affairs Canada
- CBT-i – US Veteran Affairs
- Mindfulness Coach-US Veteran Affairs

INSTAGRAM

- @thenedic (the national eating disorder information center)
- <http://my3square.com/live/>

Waterstone Foundation

For Ontario residents: If interested in receiving eating disorder treatment at a private clinic but do not have the financial resources available the Waterstone Foundation will provide financial aid to eligible applicants. For more information and to apply, visit www.waterstonefoundation.ca

COVID-19 RELATED FINANCIAL AID

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

This link provides detailed information about the most up-to-date changes in federal financial assistance/support linked to COVID-19 under the following categories.

- Individuals and Families
- Loss of Income
- Indigenous People
- Seniors
- Youth-Students and Recent Grads
- Support for Business and Employment

<https://budget.ontario.ca/2020.marchupdate/>

This link references specific information related to provincial aid and planning.

OTHER FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Ontario Works:

- Now offering emergency assistance related to COVID-19
- <https://ea.mcass.gov.on.ca/>

Ontario Disability Support Payments

- Currently waiving deadlines for ODSP applications and medical review packages during Covid-19 time period.
- Call Disability Adjudication Unit at 1-888-256-6758 if you have any questions about your file
- www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/odsp/incomesupport/IS_Application.aspx

CPP –Disability

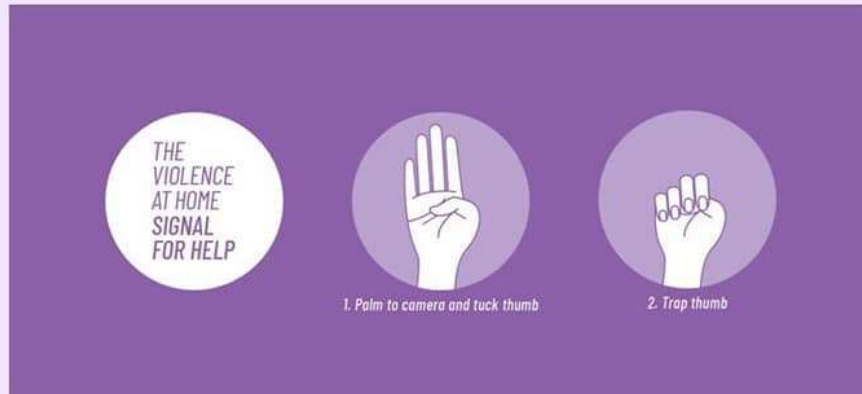
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-disability-benefit/apply.html>

FOR THOSE WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN ABUSIVE HOME ENVIRONMENTS DURING STAY HOME ORDERS

- www.sheltersafe.ca - A Canada wide directory of contact information for local services; also offers access to a virtual legal clinic for partner violence at Luke's Place
- EndingviolenceCanada.org
- Canadianwomen.org

Use of the Safety Signal

- The social isolation measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic can make it more difficult for those who are at risk of abuse or violence to safely reach out for help.
- “Signal for Help” is a simple one-handed sign someone can use on a video call. It can help a person silently show they need help and want someone to check in with them in a safe way.
- **IF YOU SEE THE SIGNAL:** If you see, someone use the Signal for Help, check in with the person safely to find out what they need and want you to do.



Things You Can Do If You See the Signal

1. Call them and ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no”. This may reduce risk if someone is listening. For example:

“Would you like me to call 911?”

“Would you like me to call a shelter on your behalf?” (Find a shelter in your community by visiting Shelter Safe website)

“Should I look for some services that might help you and call you back?” (Find some services you can reach out to, such as Assaulted Women’s Helpline 1.866.863.0511 in Ontario)

2. Use another form of communication such as text, social media, WhatsApp, or email and ask general questions. This may reduce risk if someone is watching the person’s device or accounts. For example, you can ask:

“How are you doing?”

“How can I help you out?”

“Get in touch with me when you can.”

3. Other questions you can ask:

“Do you want me to reach out to you regularly?”

“How else can I support you?”

Canadian Women’s Foundation

If you see the signal or understand that a friend or family member need support related to an abusive situation, or if you are in this situation, there are options for help. You can call a 24/7 hotline or a navigation line to access comprehensive care through a treatment center that offers crisis support, health and forensic services.

Legal and Domestic Abuse Hotline

1 800 668-8258

For youth

- www.kidshelpphone.ca
- www.crisistextline.ca

Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centers

24/7 navigation line for services 1 855 628-7283

Crisis lines offer free, immediate and confidential one-on-one assistance to callers in need and usually operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They either are generally staffed by paid professionals, or trained volunteers. They will listen, offer support and advice, and if necessary, will try to help the caller get connected to help in his/her community.

BE WELL.

“On the other side of the storm is the strength that comes from having navigated through it. Raise your sail and begin”.

Gregory S Williams