

TIPS TO MAINTAIN MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a lot of mental stress for the global population. Fear about the disease, quarantine or self-isolation, loss of valuable time and livelihood can adversely impact mental health and lead to depression and anxiety. The mental health implications of this unprecedented situation will impact everyone differently, leading clinical psychologists to offer guidelines on how to support and manage one's mental health and that of others during these times. In the current situation, finding ways to maintain your normal routine is essential to reduce stress and potential depressive thoughts that may appear.

Some tips for a healthier 'new normal' and to maintain good mental hygiene

1. **Filter news and social media:** Constant news about the pandemic can make you feel restless and may exacerbate existing mental health problems. Be careful about the balance of watching important news and the news that could cause you to feel depressed and disrupt your mental health. Have breaks from social media and mute triggering keywords and accounts.
2. **Talk openly about mental health:** Some people might feel that talking about their depression and anxiety requires additional attention during these times – people should be encouraged to talk about their feelings. Various support helplines are available including the guidance and counselling Unit of IIT Mandi.
3. **Focus every day on what you can do and take action:** Low-tech and even no-tech solutions matter, a lot. Go outside and appreciate nature (**as allowed by our local guidelines**) at a slower pace to get a daily dose of physical exercise, relaxation and vitamin D. Call that relative or friend you haven't spoken to for a while. Practice to be more mindful and supportive of those around you. We can all learn to be more flexible and have acceptance of what we can do with the present rather than what we cannot do.
4. **Empower those around you.** We can all take ownership of and be supportive and responsive to our communities – our families, neighbourhoods, work, societies, not just our own personal agenda.
5. **Eat an 'anti-depression diet' :** Anxiety is likely to increase during the current crisis, but a well-nourished body is better at handling stress. Traditional Mediterranean food, sometimes referred to as the 'anti-depression diet', for its anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, includes whole grains, vegetables (particularly green leaves), fruit, berries, nuts (including almonds), seeds and olive oil to look after your mental health. Kamand valley is blessed with wild fruit trees such as mulberries, Aakhe, Kafal, Himalayan strawberries, gooseberries etc.

6. Get therapeutic sleep: Ninety percent of depressed people struggle with sleep, which is likely to increase with fears over the coronavirus. Good quality sleep is a form of overnight therapy and increases the chance of handling strong emotions effectively. Try to wake up and go to bed at the same time every day. Achieving eight hours of sleep, and having no screen time two hours before bedtime will also help.