



Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute

A Lifestyle Medicine Approach to COVID-19

We at Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute share your concern about the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic. While physical distancing, frequent handwashing, and not touching your face are important for slowing the spread of the disease, we can further reduce risk by employing the pillars of Lifestyle Medicine.

Please feel free to share this message with anyone who might benefit.

Recommendations:

- Nutrition – Move as far toward a whole-food, plant-based diet as you can. In particular, eat lots of leafy greens, vegetables and fruits across a rainbow of colors, and eliminate animal products. This will help develop a healthy microbiome, reduce inflammation, and give you a spectrum of micronutrients to maximize health.
- Activity – Physical activity is important for the heart and lungs, for immunity, and for mood. Under usual circumstances, you should aim for moderate exercise, for 150 minutes, divided into multiple sessions (e.g., 30 minutes, 5 times per week). However, there was a large study of the Hong Kong flu (different from coronavirus, but we don't yet have studies on coronavirus) that showed that the low-moderate exercisers had the lowest mortality. If you routinely exercise for 150 minutes per week or more, it is probably fine to continue – just don't exercise to exhaustion or if you are feeling ill. If you don't usually do that much exercise, aim for 20-45 minutes of mild-moderate exercise 3 times per week. Avoid contact sports, and if you are using equipment, disinfect it after using it.
- Substances – Avoid smoking, vaping, or inhaling any substance, which can be toxic to the lungs.
- Sleep – Sleep is critical for your immune system. Aim to get 7-8 hours of sleep nightly, and to wake up rested. Go to bed at a regular time. Make sure your room is cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable. Avoid screens at least 90 minutes before bedtime. Develop a “wind down” ritual, like listening to soft music, writing in a journal, or reading a book.
- Stress – This is a stressful time. Managing stress is important to reduce cortisol levels and optimize your immune system. Some things to consider in reducing stress: talk with friends and family; practice mindfulness and meditation; do deep breathing exercises. If you find that your stress is becoming unmanageable, seek help sooner rather than later.
- Relationships – This is an important time to support and be supported by the people you love. Be kind; listen to each other; express your feelings and listen to the feelings of others. Call friends. Try to help neighbors or others who may need a hand.
- Time outdoors – being outside is calming. And you can walk with a friend and still maintain social distancing! (Just stay 6 feet away.) Try to get outside every day, especially during the middle of the day.
- Meaning and purpose – This is a time for reflection, as well as a time for action. Reach out to others, to see if there is a way you can help. If you are religious, use the power of prayer. Think about writing a personal mission statement. Staying true to your core values will help you maintain resilience.
- Positive emotions / finding joy – There is a saying that “It's better to light a single candle than to sit and curse the dark.” Be that candle. Find the moments of joy and light, even if they are few and far between. Use this time at home to set goals and plans for yourself and your family – having something to look forward to will help you get through this. Think about all the things you are grateful for – and write them down. Smile and laugh when you can. Your immune system will thank you!