Agenda

- Mental health impact of pandemic
- Adaptive Coping: Stress Reduction
- Check-in and questions
- Relaxation Skill #1: Breathing
- Experiential practice
- Check-in and questions
- Practice guidelines
Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic for HCW

- Key stressors: fear of contagion, increased workload, new and varying protocols, equipment issues, and more severely ill patients
- Most common mental health changes include increased distress as well as symptoms of anxiety, depression and insomnia

MULLER ET AL., 2020; WALTON ET AL., 2020; IMAGE BY CROMACONCEPTOVISUAL FROM PIXABAY
Coping with Chronic Stress

- **Definition:** Continuous stress that persists for prolonged period of time

- Short-term impact of stress: physiological arousal due to the *stress response*

- Chronic stress results in frequent activation of the *stress response*, which can impact physical and psychological well-being

- Long-term impact of chronic stress: anxiety, depression, impaired concentration, fatigue, insomnia, heart disease, pain issues and weakened immune system

*American Psychological Association, 2019; Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 2019; Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay*
Reducing Stress & Enhancing Emotional Well-Being

- Managing media and social media exposure
- Maintaining social connection
- Promoting healthy thoughts
- Fostering resilience
Managing Media & Social Media Exposure

- Obtain information from one or two reliable sources
- Set parameters on frequency and duration of exposure
- Limit exposure to recurring media stories
- **KEY:** View enough to stay informed but limit exposure to prevent increased anxiety

GARFIN ET AL, 2020; WEIR, 2020; IMAGE BY GERD ALTMANN FROM PIXABAY
Maintaining Social Connection

- Connect with others on a consistent basis
- Be proactive and strategic
- Seek support by sharing negative experiences with trusted contacts
- Offer and provide support for others
Promoting Healthy Thoughts

- Learn to identify *unhelpful or negative self-talk*, which contributes to negative emotions
- Try to replace with more helpful thoughts:
  - Seek to accept what cannot be changed, focus on what you can control or influence
  - “I have no control over anything” vs “I can control some things and am going to focus on those.”
- Set realistic expectations and achievable goals within your current circumstances
  - “I should be coping better” vs “Most people are struggling and I’m doing the best I can.”

Fostering Resilience

- **Definition**: process of adapting well to trauma, adversity or significant stress

- **Ways to increase resilience**:
  - *Practice wellness*: physical & mental self-care
  - *Learn from experience*: consider how you effectively coped with previous difficulties
  - *Find meaning*: achievable goals that provide a sense of purpose and accomplishment
  - *Maintain hope*: positive future outlook

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2012; MAYO CLINIC, 2020; PECONGA ET AL., 2020; IMAGE BY NADJA DONAUER FROM PIXABAY
Professional Assistance

- Potential indicators: excessive symptoms, subjective distress, impaired daily functioning, compromised relationships, and/or safety concerns
- Many time-limited, evidence-based therapies are available for a range of issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, insomnia)
- *Psychology Today: Find a Therapist*
  

- *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255*
  
  [https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)
Mental Health Resources

- American Psychological Association: COVID-19 Information & Resources
  https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/

- National Center for PTSD: COVID-19 Resources for Managing Stress
  https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/index.asp

- International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies: COVID-19 Resources
  https://istss.org/public-resources/covid-19-resources

- Center for Traumatic Stress Studies: COVID-19 Pandemic Resource Pages
Health Professional Resources

- American Medical Association: Managing Mental Health During COVID-19
  https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/index.asp

- CDC: Healthcare Personnel and First Responders: How to Cope with Stress and Build Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Uniformed Services University: A Guide to Support the Well-being of Healthcare Personnel During a Time of Crisis
  https://www.usuhs.edu/sites/default/files/media/ncdmph/pdf/a_guide_to_support_the_well-being_of_healthcare_personnel_during_a_time.pdf

- Massachusetts General Hospital: For Health Care Providers
  https://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/guide-to-mental-health-resources/health-care-providers
Poll Question & Check-In

Which of these four strategies may be the most beneficial for you to try first?
Relaxation Skills

- **Purpose**: Engage in behaviors that elicit the *relaxation response*, which counteracts the physiological arousal caused by the stress response.

- **Common relaxation techniques**:
  - Breathing
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)
  - Guided Imagery

- **Goal**: Develop a range of relaxation skills to determine which work best for you.

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DAVIS, ESHELMAN & MCKAY, 2019 ; IMAGE BY GERD ALTMANN FROM PIXABAY
The Importance of Breathing

- Breathing is essential for survival as each breath allows us to obtain oxygen and dispel carbon dioxide.
- Poor breathing habits disrupt the flow of these gases in the body and can make it more difficult to deal with stress.
- Learning to breathe more slowly with evenly-paced breaths can focus the mind and relax the body.

Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 2019; Image by Yanalya from Freepik
Breathing Patterns

- Chest (thoracic) breathing:
  - Rapid and shallow breaths
  - Associated with chronic stress and tension
  - May result in dizziness, heart palpitations, weakness or shortness of breath when associated with the stress response

- Abdominal (diaphragmatic) breathing:
  - Deeper and slower breaths
  - Associated with relaxation
  - Easiest way to produce the relaxation response

Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 2019; Image by Victor Garcia from Unsplash
Rate Your Stress Level

- Rating your stress level before and after each relaxation exercise can help you determine its effectiveness.
- Utilize a basic scale of zero to ten (0-10) to rate your stress level:
  - Zero (0) = no distress at all
  - Ten (10) = your maximum level of distress
- Tracking your stress level before and after each relaxation exercise over time can help you determine your proficiency with that skill.
- The more you practice relaxation skills, the better you’ll become at relaxing.

FOA ET AL., 2019
Abdominal Breathing: Instructions

- Rate your current stress level
- Sit upright in a chair or lie on your back
- Place one hand on your abdomen
- Close your eyes if comfortable or find a point in the room to focus upon
- Follow along with the guided breathing exercise:
  - Inhale to count of 4
  - Brief pause
  - Exhale to count of 4
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth (if possible)
- As you inhale, feel your abdomen expand and your hand rise, as you exhale feel your abdomen flatten and your hand lower

- If at any point during the exercise you experience any discomfort, please feel free to pause or discontinue.

- If my pacing is too fast or too slow for you, please feel free to modify and find the rate that works best for you.

- While practicing at home, if you experience any ongoing negative physical side effects, please consider consulting a physician.

DAVIS, ESHELMAN & MCKAY, 2019
Poll Question & Check-In

How did you respond to the abdominal breathing technique?
The Importance of Practice: Building Skills

- **Key**: Consistent practice promotes skills acquisition and better results
- Week One: *Abdominal Breathing*
  - Rate your stress level (0-10) before and after each exercise.
  - Try to complete 5-10 minutes of abdominal breathing one to two times per day.
  - Utilize the guided exercise in the YouTube video if helpful.
  - Try to gradually increase the duration up to 20 minutes over time as you become more proficient.
References

- Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies. *Deciding when to seek treatment*. https://www.abct.org/Information/?m=mInformation&fa=DecidingWhenToSeek
References


