CORONAVIRUS:
PRACTICING WELLNESS WHILE YOU STAY AT HOME

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are working from home these days. Under normal circumstances, telecommuting can offer a pleasant break from your daily routine. You can enjoy freedom from a long commute and the luxury of working in your sweats. But this situation is far from normal.

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> **Harpreet Gujral, DNP, FNP-BC**
> **Nurse Practitioner, Johns Hopkins' Sibley Memorial Hospital**

Harpreet Gujral, program director of integrative medicine at Johns Hopkins' Sibley Memorial Hospital, offers the following suggestions on staying centered and healthy when you're working at home during the pandemic.

► GREETING THE DAY

If you're waking in the morning and feeling uncertain because your routine is so different, Gujral suggests a 15-minute ritual to get prepared for your day.

"First thing in the morning, I recommend spending 10 to 15 minutes on self-care. I take a moment to think about three things I'm grateful for. They can be simple things, such as a comfy blanket, a safe home, warmth, spring trees, blue sky or blossoming trees."

Many of us lunge for our cellphones as soon as we're conscious, but Gujral says she makes a point not to pick up her phone for at least 15 minutes.

► BREATHING FOR STRESS RELIEF

Before the day's demands take over, Gujral recommends becoming centered with some stress-relieving breaths.

"Take a few minutes to really focus on your breathing. There is a technique called 4-7-8 breathing, or relaxing breath, which helps you concentrate on deep breaths. The practice is simple: Breathe in for a count of 4, hold for a count of 7 and breathe out for a count of 8. Practicing this for four breaths four times each day or more can help relieve anxiety and reset the autonomic nervous system," Gujral says.

► MOVING AND STRETCHING, INDOORS AND OUT

Gujral says staying active can increase immunity and boost mental health. "Stress puts us up in our head, and we forget about the rest of our bodies," she says. "Try 10 minutes of qi gong—movements that help you practice mindfulness—or use stretches and yoga poses to bring your awareness back into your body."

Even if you don't know how to practice these disciplines, she says, you can simply close your eyes and move your awareness into your feet to feel more grounded. "Concentrate on your feet and their connection to the floor and the earth to get out of your worries," she advises.

Social distancing doesn't mean you have to isolate yourself or to stay inside. Gujral says gardening and hiking outdoors and taking notice of the natural world helps alleviate anxiety and improve well-being.

"Home air can get stuffy," she says. Gujral suggests getting outside each day for 15 minutes of fresh air and sunshine, which helps the body make vitamin D. "Vitamin D deficiency can create vulnerability to the common cold," she notes.

► EATING WELL

Good nutrition is essential in stressful times. "We need the best nutrition now," Gujral notes, adding that trying to boost your immunity with supplements may not be as helpful as simply eating whole foods.

"Eat meals rich in plant-based foods, especially leafy vegetables and fruit," she says. "Work in the whole rainbow of produce colors to get all the phytonutrients."

Taking steps to cut out inflammatory foods such as sugar and bad fats is a good idea. These foods might be more tempting when you're feeling tense or worried. "Don't eat your feelings. Cook homemade foods with ginger and turmeric. A little rosemary can be good for focus," she says. Drink plenty of water, and consider green or black tea.

► AT YOUR HOME OFFICE

"Bring in something from outdoors for your at-home desk," Gujral suggests. "Rocks, branches, flowers, even a picture, photograph or screen saver depicting a beautiful, calming scene can help remind you of nature."

"And don't forget the power of music. Listening to music that inspires you can help you focus and improve your mood."

► STAYING FOCUSED

Gujral acknowledges that it can be hard to concentrate on work when your daily routine is off-kilter and the future is uncertain. Consume social media conservatively.

If aromatherapy agrees with you, a little eucalyptus or jasmine can make your home office more conducive to calm productivity. Gujral says it's important to remember that essential oils are not effective treatments for disease, but they can help uplift mood or create a more relaxing environment.

Source: www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-practicing-wellness-while-you-stay-at-home

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► PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

It's also important to keep in touch with friends, especially the ones who uplift you, and give people the benefit of the doubt during this challenging time.

Most important are mindfulness and gratitude, Gujral says. "Focus on what's at hand," she says. "When you wash your hands, take a moment and say to yourself, 'I fill my heart with gratitude for what's going well.' Sprinkle this affirmation through your day, with every hand-wash."