

Boosting your mental health during a crisis

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STAYING FIT & HEALTHY – PHYSICAL HEALTH

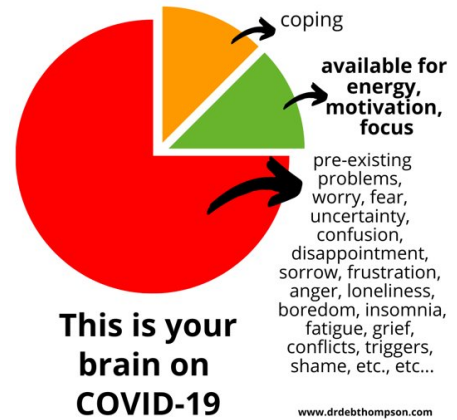
Has its ups and downs (some days we are better at exercising, making good choices, remembering our vitamins, getting a good night's sleep...) = better equipped to handle physical challenges

STAYING FIT & HEALTHY – MENTAL HEALTH

Just like physical health, mental health requires attention and care. Those with underlying conditions (challenges) have less resources or reserves to fight off the stress and anxiety we're now facing.

Covid-19 is a massive, chronic, extended mental health challenge that is a marathon, not a sprint

Stress, uncertainty, anxiety, worry triggers the fight-or-flight response in your body. Our bodies are having physical reactions to an unknown but ever-present threat.



KING OF THE JUNGLE

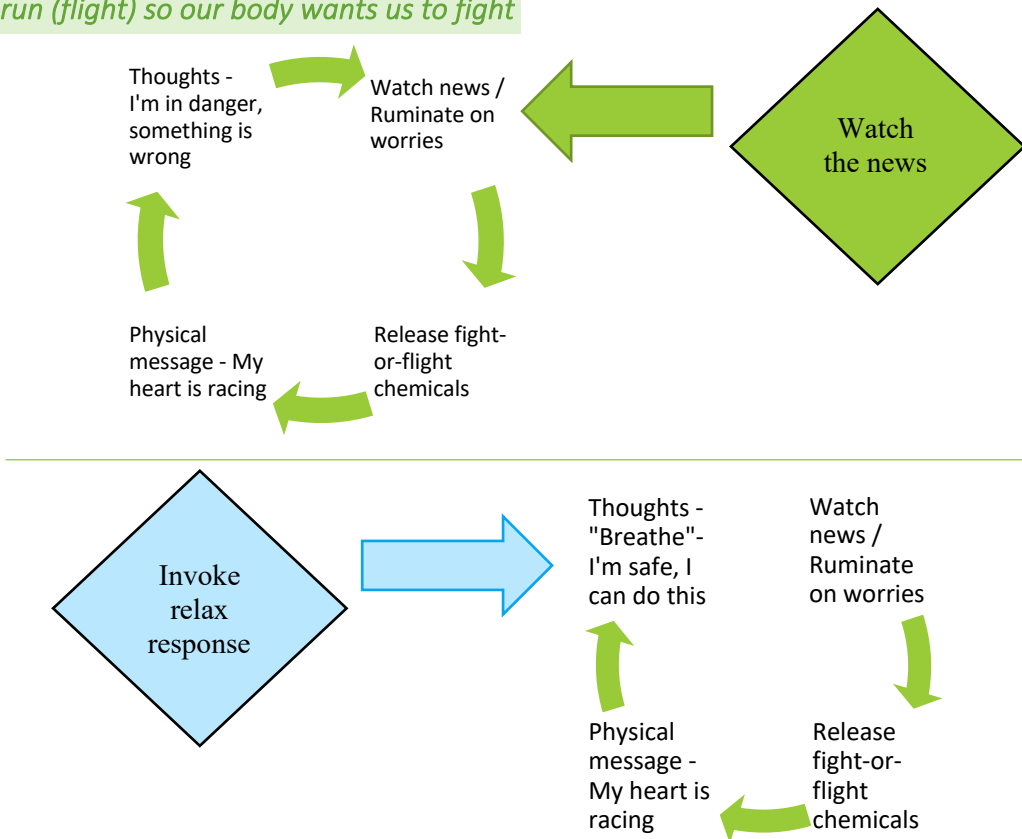
Fight-or-flight responses

- Your alarm system (amygdala) is going off
- Your emotional regulation and memory is distracted (hippocampus)
- Your body diverts blood away from the frontal cortex because it wants to be ready to act; your higher levels of reasoning are put on hold "It's a time for action, not thinking"
- Your sympathetic nervous system is fully engaged; adrenal glands start producing chemicals (hormones and neurotransmitters) for an acute, short-term response to a crisis

Being in a state of readiness is exhausting; a constant state of sympathetic nervous system activation without something to react to =
anxiety

Covid-19 as a chronic threat is always in the background as we go through our day; it's undefined and ambiguous, it's rippling into so many different areas...

We can't run (flight) so our body wants us to fight



Strategies for overriding the fight-or-flight response

Strategy 1: Sleep

- *Lack of sleep depletes our ability to manage anxiety; anxiety reduces our ability to sleep*
- *Sleep Hygiene: steps you can take to reduce your stress about not sleeping*

<https://drjotisamra.com/sleep-resources/>

Strategy 2: Emotional patience and kindness

- *Fight-or-flight has you primed to react to things in an explosive (and adaptive way)*
- *Remember we are all emotionally raw, with nowhere to run to*

Strategy 3: Do physical distancing but keep socially connected

- *Call a friend, family member, set an internet or phone date, write a thank you note to someone*
- *When your sympathetic nervous system sends you a message to "do something", call someone and make a meaningful connection*
- *Meaningful connections can be with animals*

Social connection is how we heal, how we dissipate stress



Strategy 4: Focus on your body

- *Doing a mindful activity forces you to concentrate on something that will displace your anxiety*
- *Mindful activities reduce cortisol, release endorphins – an antidote to stress*



Fight anxiety at the neurochemical level

Resources

The Center for Mind-Body Medicine
5 Minute dance for trauma release
cmbm.org

Meditation and sleep audio
calm.com



The Center for
**Mind-Body
Medicine**

Compassion Recharge
compassionrecharge.com

