

## Emotional\* & Spiritual Wellness During Covid-19

We're all likely experiencing some emotional discomfort (or worse)--given the spread of Covid-19 and the disruption to our lives. The situation is new and unpredictable! Because of that, people will respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in a variety of ways: some will under-respond and view the threat as an exaggeration, others will over-respond and become highly anxious. Yet others will respond somewhere in the middle. For those with pre-existing mental health conditions, they may be exacerbated at this time. All responses are normal--to a situation that is ABNORMAL!

Some emotions we may experience at this time are:

- Panic
- Stress
- Overwhelmed
- Feeling unsafe
- Lockdowns & states of emergency can trigger flashbacks of past war-related trauma
- Grief
- Frustration
- Sad
- Helpless
- Boredom
- Guilt
- Excitement
- Fear
- Worry
- Uncertainty
- Feeling insecure
- Distress
- Impatience
- Depressed
- Feeling inadequate
- Lonely
- Meaninglessness
- Gratitude
- Anxiety
- Paranoia
- Confusion
- Anger
- Discouraged
- Hopeless
- Jaded
- Relief
- Compassion

Given this array of emotions, what are some ways to stay emotionally and spiritually well during this time? The field of psychoneuroimmunology suggests that emotional wellness could enhance the functioning of our immune system which is important in the fight against viruses. The trick is to tone down negative emotions, while tuning up positive ones. The following outline some ways to do this.

**Maintain perspective.** Consider this time as a trial, a test of our faith and relationship with Allah (swt). Remember Surah Baqarah, v. 155, *“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of **wealth** and **lives** and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient.” “So lose not heart nor fall in despair...”* (Surah Al-Imran, v. 139). *“Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!”* (Surah Az-Zumar, v. 10). During the time of the Prophet (saw), our ummah faced significant trials, such as severe persecution from the Quraysh which included a ban against trading with the Muslims that led to starvation and poverty amongst the ummah. Our ummah, however, survived and flourished. We can again survive and overcome this trial! *(This can help enhance meaningfulness & patience.)*

**Remind yourself that the current crisis will pass & we're all in this together!** Remember, Surah Ash-Sharh (The Relief), v. 5-6, *“For indeed, with hardship (will be) ease.”* Also, *“O you who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; **strengthen each other**; and fear Allah; that you may prosper”* (Surah Al-Imran, v. 200). As Ramadan approaches, please keep in mind that we can still practice our faith well by having iftars at home and praying taraweeh with those we live. Taraweeh prayers are recorded live daily on YouTube. *(This can help enhance hopefulness, safety, and security.)*

**Focus on what you can control, rather than on what you can't.** You can control your own social distancing, what you watch on television/the web/social media, how you cope with your feelings, and who you talk to. But, you can't control others' behaviours, government action or inaction, what's available at the store, the economy or your initial feelings. Putting your energy into what you can control will feel better. *(This can alleviate helplessness & enhance feelings of adequacy.)*

**Consider self-compassion.** Rather than ignoring your negative emotions, consider embracing them. Accept that we all experience negative, painful feelings, especially as we go through difficulties in life, and how we handle those negative emotions and experiences won't always be perfect. Sometimes, we will struggle, fall, and fail. But, that doesn't mean we're flawed or weak; only that we're human. We can practice saying to ourselves (adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff):

- "It's hard to feel \_\_\_\_\_ right now. But, feeling \_\_\_\_\_ is part of the human experience. I choose to practice self-compassion right now. And, in this moment, I choose to engage in \_\_\_\_\_ (an action consistent with Islamic values) to take care of myself and bring myself some inner peace." *(This can alleviate distress & enhance tranquility and patience.)*

**Practice compassion for others & ourselves.** Ramadan is here, and the goal of fasting is to practice resisting urges, impulses, and desires—whether they are cravings to eat or drink, desires to engage in (illicit) sexual behaviours, or giving in to angry or other impulses (e.g. to spend). Why would Allah (swt) want us to do this? Because we are slaves to Him, not to our desires and impulses! Besides, constantly giving in to these urges will eventually have a negative impact on our relationships, our physical, mental, and financial health. During the month of Ramadan, we can challenge ourselves to take some deep breaths, and resist the urge to shout, put down, or behave unkindly to others and ourselves. If others make us angry, we can say to ourselves, "I choose to practice compassion for this person right now. I will walk away/cool down/let them know how I feel and what I want in an assertive, but gentle way." *Scholars of the Qur'an estimate that permutations of the words, "compassion, mercy, and kind" are mentioned 120-291 times in the Qur'an suggesting the importance of these traits in the sight of Allah (swt). (This can enhance adequacy and patience.)*

**Self-Isolation isn't always a bad thing.** As Ramadan approaches, remember that our Prophet (saw) chose to self-isolate in a cave in Mount Hira when the Qur'an was revealed! Khadija (ra) used to leave food for him at the cave entrance! Consider some blessings gained during this time, such as increased opportunities to spend with family & Allah (swt), taking time out from a busy schedule, time to self-reflect, re-centre & rest. *(This can help enhance meaningfulness and patience.)*

**Be careful of Covid-19 overload.** Limit the time you spend taking in Covid-19 news. It's coming at us from all directions and this can be downright overwhelming. Turn off/stop reading the news. Maybe check in once or twice a day--even for people who like to follow the news. *(This can help with regulating any of the negative emotions listed above.)*

**Be careful of Covid-19 misinformation.** Rumors abound about what's open, what's not, what's closing, and so on. Check out rumors for yourself by going to reputable sources. Check out provincial and local government sites for up to date information about closings. Go to the World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/>), the Government of Canada Health Site (Canada.ca/COVID-19), or the Government of Manitoba website (<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/index.html>) for correct information about the virus. *(This can help with regulating any of the negative emotions listed above.)*

**Remember the facts:** Remember the facts: 0.02% of Manitobans currently have the virus, and 98% of them are still alive! Let's flatten and lower the curve by implementing some of the strategies listed here to keep us emotionally & spiritually well! Go Team Manitoba! Also, 93% of all tests in Canada for COVID-19 come back negative (all statistics according to Canada.ca/COVID-19 as of May 1, 2020). *(This can help enhance hopefulness, safety, and security.)*

**Our emotions reside in our bodies, so taking good care of our body means taking good care of our emotions! Additionally, taking care of our bodies means taking care of our physical health which can help boost our immune system, and therefore enhance our body's ability to fight viruses!**

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule—try to go to sleep and wake up at roughly the same time.
- Work towards maintaining good nutrition and regular meals.
- Limit caffeine intake.
- Avoid depending on tobacco, other recreational drugs (legal & illegal), or alcohol to cope.
- Move your body -get some exercise or do something so you're not just sedentary!
- Spend some time outside, in nature, especially. Even a brisk walk has health benefits and it definitely has emotional benefits. You could even try to take a pleasure walk: a 15 to 30 minute casual stroll outside, taking in as much of the world as you can, noticing as many pleasurable things as possible (e.g. blue sky, star constellations, a bird flying). *"And the earth, We spread it out, and cast therein firmly set mountains and We have made to grow therein of all beautiful kinds; to give sight and as a reminder to every servant who turns to Allah."* (Surah Qaf, v.7-8)
- Practice deep breathing, relaxation, mindfulness, or yoga. Not sure how to do these? YouTube!!
- Try taking up an activity that requires use of your body and mind, which can give you an emotional break: beading, knitting or art

**A bodily symptom, such as a runny nose, headache, or weakness does not automatically mean you have the virus!** The only way to ensure you have the virus is through medical testing. Please call Health Links at 204-788-8200, 24/7, to figure out whether you need to undergo testing. *(This may help alleviate additional worry.)*

**Maintain a schedule:** This can include what time you would like to get up & go to bed, have meals, work/study, pray, relax, exercise, do household chores, connect with others, other daily habits (e.g. showering). Having a schedule helps us contain emotions and feel a sense of control during times when we may otherwise feel helpless. Try as much as possible, if safe, to do what you ordinarily would. For example, if you usually go to the gym every day, continue to work out daily, but at home or outside (away from people). *(This can help alleviate helplessness, uncertainty, and feeling inadequate; enhance security and adequacy.)*

**Social connection is still important in this time of "social distancing"!** Maintain connections with family and friends via telephone, texting, Facetime, Skype, Zoom, etc. Reconnect with a family member or friend whom you've lost contact with, or create an online club. You might even try the old-fashioned art of letter writing! Think of other creative ways to connect. *(This can help alleviate loneliness & boredom.)*

**Take the focus off of yourself: do something kind for someone else.** Give zakat & sadaqa which is an important practice during Ramadan. Call someone to connect – don't just talk about Covid-19 though! Reach out to someone elderly or with a disability via telephone & ask how they are. Arrange to have something delivered or mailed to someone if it's within your means. Volunteer if it's safe to do so. *(This can help alleviate loneliness & boredom; enhance compassion & meaningfulness.)*

**Spend time with pets if you have one.** Looking after and being with pets can make a tough day easier. *(This can help alleviate loneliness; enhance safety and security.)*

**Consider keeping a journal about what this experience has been like for you.** But be sure to end your daily entry with 3 good things about the day, however small, to help keep your spirits up. Try a gratitude activity once a day where you identify one thing you're grateful for by filling in the following statement: I'm grateful for \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." *(This can help with regulating any of the negative emotions listed above, and enhance gratitude.)* From Surah Ibrahim, v. 7, "And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor].'"

**Try something that diverts your attention, comforts you, enhances your growth & development, and is new:** *(Can alleviate negative emotions listed above & enhance meaningfulness, safety, adequacy, gratitude & excitement)*

- Consider this a time to increase our ibadah, e.g. by doing extra prayers, extra supplications (Islam has specific salah & duas for times of danger and fear & for illness)
- Increase your deen and knowledge of Islam by listening to lectures, reading/memorizing Qur'an, learning Arabic
- Make a list of things that give you joy, and try to do one (if safely possible) daily
- Take a hot bath with bath oil or bubbles, or a cold shower!
- Curl up under a blanket with hot tea/cocoa and read a good book
- Light incense or a candle
- Rub peppermint oil under your nose
- Watch a funny movie/clip or read a funny story
- Think of many uses for a random object (e.g., what are all things you can do with a twist-tie?)
- Focus on how it feels to breathe – notice how your chest and stomach move with each breath
- Do a task that is exacting and requires focus and concentration, such as beading or sewing
- Pick a subject (not Covid-19!) and research it on the web or watch a documentary
- Tour a museum, zoo, national park or outer space online! Yes, it's possible—just search it!
- Draw or colour
- Play a board game or do a puzzle
- Bake or cook
- Clean/spring clean/declutter/show your home some love
- Start a hobby or interest that you always wanted to pursue, but never had the time to before
- Learn a new language

**Avoid/cut down on less healthy distractions/forms of escape:**

- Excessive social media use
- Excessive gaming
- Excessive entertainment
- Excessive online shopping
- Excessive online dating
- Pornography or similar sites

Consider making use of one of the many mental health apps that are available for free and for pay. You might find this link helpful in finding something that speaks to you. <https://www.psych.com/25-best-mental-health-apps> *(These can help alleviate panic, fear, anxiety, stress, and worry; enhance safety.)*

<b>Wellness-Related Apps</b>			
App Name	Description	Android Compatible	Apple Compatible
<b>Meditation, Breathing, and Yoga</b>			
Calm: Meditate, Sleep, Relax	Includes meditation exercises, guided relaxation, calming music, stories	Yes	Yes
Stop, Breathe, Think	Meditation and mindfulness recommendations to you de-stress, sleep better, and build emotional strength and confidence.	Yes	Yes
Headspace	Includes meditation and sleep aids; mindfulness exercises; tracking your exercise, meditation, etc.	Yes	Yes
Serenity: Guided Meditation and Mindfulness	Takes you through mindfulness activities step-by-step (ex. breathing, learning the pull of the mind, etc.)	Yes	Yes
Breathe		Yes	Yes
Yoga for Beginners: Down Dog	Walks a beginner through the foundations of yoga, step-by-step instruction and video	Yes	Yes
Breathly	Another breathing app with preset functions (ex. four-square breathing)	Yes	Yes
<a href="http://www.just-a-minute.org/en/resource_centre/">http://www.just-a-minute.org/en/resource_centre/</a>	1-minute meditations for relaxation, concentration, connecting, silence, etc		
<b>Other Apps</b>			
Simple Habit	Wellness and sleep app	Yes	Yes
Daylio	Mood tracker and journaling app	No	Yes
Calm in the Storm	An app for dealing with the stresses in life	Yes	Yes
Mindshift CBT	From Anxiety Canada, CBT skills	Yes	Yes

• If you're a Manitoba resident over 16 years old, you can access an online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy program:

- <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/bewell/virtualtherapy.html>

• Some additional website links that you might find helpful:

- Audio relaxation from the Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba:  
<http://www.adam.mb.ca/audio-relaxation>
- TED Article on managing anxiety related to Covid-19:  
<https://ideas.ted.com/dear-guy-im-incredibly-anxious-about-coronavirus-what-can-i-do/>

- <https://theconversation.com/7-science-based-strategies-to-cope-with-coronavirus-anxiety-133207>
- **If you're experiencing a mental health crisis . . . .**
  - You can go to the Crisis Response Centre at 817 Bannatyne Avenue (but please call Mobile Crisis Service below beforehand to ensure you will be seen)
  - Use one of several available crisis line services:
    - Mobile Crisis Service: **204-940-1781**
    - Klinik Crisis Line: **204-786-8686**
    - Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line: **1-877-435-7170**
    - First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Services: **1-855-242-3310**
    - Sexual Assault Crisis Line: **1-888-292-7565**
- **If you need some support, but it's not a crisis....**
  - Email the Mental Health Initiative at [counselling@miaonline.org](mailto:counselling@miaonline.org) or call them at **204-202-3109**; we are continuing to provide telephone/online counselling & other programming
  - Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba has a support line: **204-925-0040**. The line is checked 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., Monday to Friday & 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., weekends. Please leave your name, phone number or email address and an ADAM representative will get in touch with you within a short period of time.
  - A Woman's Place: **204-940-6624**, support line for women impacted by domestic violence, Monday to Friday, 9am - 9:00pm.

**May Allah (swt) help us to stay emotionally & spiritually well, and physically safe! Our efforts & His Help are our best defense!**

\*Adapted from resources provided by K. Bradley, Gettysburg College, 2020, AUCCCD resources. Original version (March 13, 2020) written by Dave Ness, Danna McDonald & Kayla Tessier from University of Manitoba's Student Counselling Centre, modified & adapted for the Muslim context by Dr. Natasha Ali.