



# Enterprise Stress Management

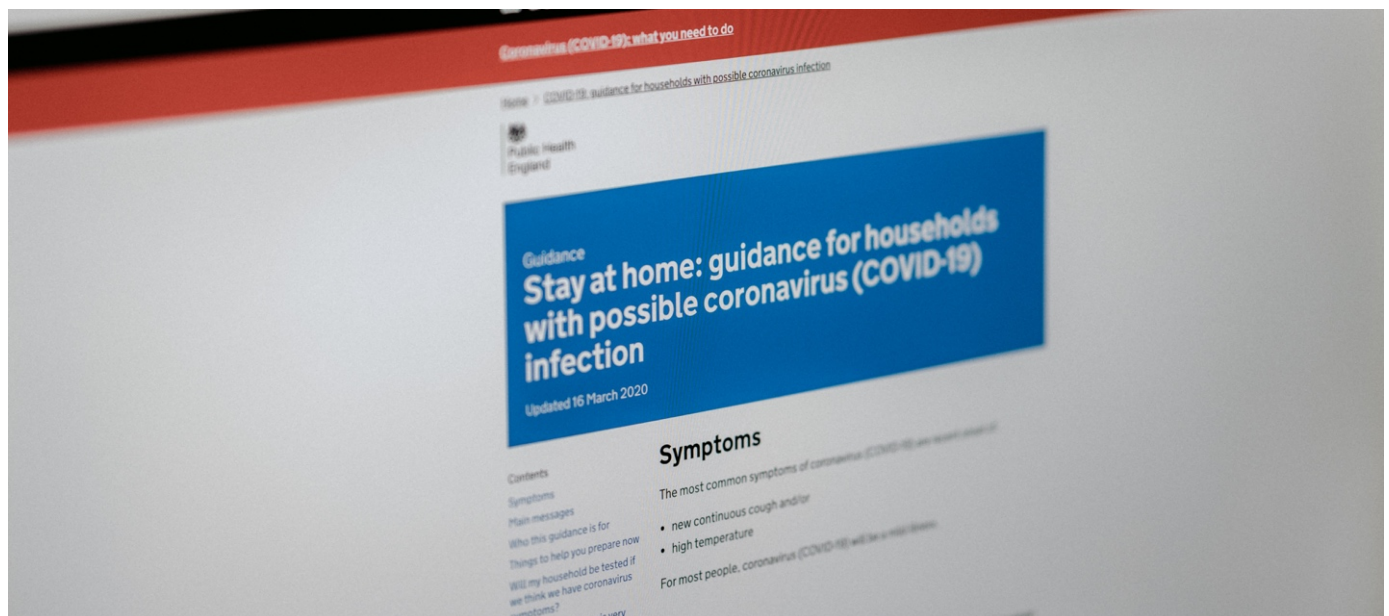
## Responding to Pandemic Stress during COVID-19

Last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the novel coronavirus COVID-19 a global pandemic. As we watch international borders shutting down to non-essential travel, countries declaring 'States of Emergency' and workplaces sending employees home to prevent the spread of Covid-19, we're witnessing rising stress levels as fear and anxiety cause overwhelming emotions and strong responses in our communities locally, and globally.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include fear and worry about one's own health and the health of loved ones, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, difficulty focusing or concentrating, worsening of chronic health problems, and increased use of substances to cope with stress. It is critical to support each other and our businesses to maintain health and stay sane during these uncertain times.

In terms of changes to business operations, many organizations are working remotely during isolation, while essential services continue operating with strict policies to ensure cleanliness and safety for employees. For those individuals working remotely, this may be a new experience, causing higher stress levels as employees adjust to new routines and manage a new form of work-life balance, thus reducing productivity and performance. For those who continue to work in the workplace, pandemic related stress may be causing lower morale and poor motivation to work, affecting employee engagement, workplace culture, and economic output.

As a result of the current pandemic, ESM is providing a Stress Clinic that focuses on monitoring stress levels while reducing panic, anxiety, and the effects of isolation in order to mitigate the impacts of pandemic-related stress to the organization.





Here are some of tips for reducing stress during this time:

### *1. Reducing Panic and Anxiety*

Uncertainty about health and the future creates fear and worry, which amps up the fight or flight responses experienced during stress. The key is to first notice when you get triggered and train yourself to monitor these primitive reactions. Often, you can feel bodily signs, like feeling hot and sweaty, flush in the face, shallow breathing, and a faster heart rate. You may feel anxious and your thoughts speed up, making you feel worried, panicked and wanting to act impulsively. Alternatively, you may feel frozen and unable to leave your house, feeling extreme fear when interacting with others, or catastrophizing the potential outcomes, believing you are going to die. Try to recognize these signs and calm yourself down before these thoughts build into a cascade effect. Create a list of positive reassurances and repeat those to yourself when you feel stressed – repeating and reassuring yourself will help reinforce new neural pathways as they are created through every positive repetition.

Once you identify the trigger, the key is to change your physiology. At this time, cortisol and adrenaline are being pumped through your body in the fight or flight response, and the easiest way to take control of your body's response and calm down is through breathing. Shallow, rapid breathing can be reversed by taking several deep breaths into your belly, which interfaces with your autonomic nervous system and slows down your heart rate and your brain's cortisol production to reduce stress. If you feel frozen, focus on connecting with your senses - how your feet feel on the ground, how your body feels in the chair, walk around slowly, or distract your senses with a new smell to change your physiology. Find things that work for you and keep practicing these positive behaviours to keep calm.

### *2. Managing the Effects of Isolation*

Spending time alone can be beneficial and a much-needed detox from the busyness of our modern tech-filled lives, however, even a two weeklong quarantine can cause feelings of isolation, even in remote work situations. Research on human isolation from NASA has shown that having cognitive strategies is essential to mitigating risk by reframing and managing periods of isolation. First, frame your mind to the isolation period by telling yourself that you're in isolation for X number of days and create a game plan. Stick to normal routines, such as setting aside specific times for work, chores, and taking care of your body and mind with exercise and self-care. Setting daily goals is a great way to stay motivated and feel accomplished, even without leaving the house. With today's technology, we have plenty of resources that provide online workouts and guided meditation series that you can add to your schedule. Secondly, communication is also crucial to maintaining social connections, which can be easily done through a variety of social technologies. Reach out to friends and family for daily dates where you connect virtually and share dinner, watch movies, play games, and share laughs to feel that sense



of connection and community. We are all in this together, and sharing those moments and struggles helps us feel less alone.

### *3. Taking Care of your Body and Mind*

Pandemic stress and isolation can impact not only our bodies and minds, but also our immune system which is why maintaining health and wellness practices are essential in fighting off any colds, potential coronavirus or prolonged stress. Scheduling time into your day for movement and exercise is one of the best ways to maintain both physical and mental health. Gyms are now closed, but movement, body weight exercises and stretching can be done easily at home by using chairs or other household items in your routines. Many fitness trainers are providing online workouts and mobility programs to keep things innovative and keep you motivated during at home workouts. Getting outside for some fresh air and sunshine is also a great idea and spending time walking or trail hiking in nature with a few friends or family members, just be sure to maintain social distancing when you're out and about.

Sunshine provides your body with essential Vitamin D and helps maintain healthy circadian rhythms to help you sleep better at night. Stress can also disrupt sleep habits, which is also essential for maintaining a strong immune system. Create a sleep routine and stick to it to help you fall asleep and stay asleep. Avoid high fat, high sugar foods and alcohol before bed, limit screen time for an hour before bed, and avoid working in your bed to help prepare your body for sleep when it needs to sleep. Consuming certain foods, such as those rich in tryptophan, such as fish, turkey, eggs, peanuts, pumpkin and sesame seeds, and milk, will help your body produce serotonin and melatonin to encourage a proper circadian rhythm and a good night's sleep. Additionally, sticking to a healthy diet full of raw foods that provide a variety of vitamins and minerals, and limiting processed foods, sugar and alcohol, will keep your body and your mind balanced and strong enough to fight off stress and infections. Take care of your body and it will take care of you.

### *4. Working from Home and Staying Focused*

Most businesses are relying on remote access and online services to help keep their employees safe and healthy, while expecting productivity and efficiency in completing work tasks from home. This can be a challenge for many reasons: setting up and using new technology that you may not be familiar with in an environment at home that may not be suitable for professional work, difficulty concentrating with family and kids around, and having an increased number of distractors, such as TV and Netflix, house chores, the couch and bed, that makes it a challenge to focus and stay on task. Let's not deny it, this can be overwhelming for some, however creating a strategy and game plan will give you the confidence you need to handle working from home, as it becomes the new normal.

To help you stay focused and be productive, determine a schedule for your work and home life and stick to it. Schedules might be flexible when working from home, however,



maintaining a routine is always the best way to make sure you get through your tasks and are separating your work and home life. Build in breaks and stick to them to avoid overworking. Since we are not changing our environment from “work to home” it is easy to work extra hours and overwork ourselves, which can cause more stress and eventually burn out. In terms of the work environment, set up a workstation in a room or space that is comfortable, ergonomic, with few distractions, and keep it separate from your bedroom. It’s important to keep your office out of your bed so that work doesn’t disrupt your sleep habits and schedule. Finally, to help keep you focused on work, there are many apps available to ensure you stay engaged in your work, such as Text-to-speech (TTS) which helps with concentration and comprehension of reading material, and can easily be used with headphones, and Web-Blocker and stay focus apps to help structure your digital environment so you can decrease the constant impulse to go on social media, YouTube, or even block internet access and certain websites so you can stay focus on your work. Find what works best for you and stick to your routine.

## How does ESM help during these stressful times?

At this time, we are providing a remote Stress Clinic that we can provide virtually to offer support for those in isolation or working remotely to minimize stress levels and keep employees healthy, along with 1-on-1 support through our Global Stress Experts. Additionally, we can monitor ongoing stress and anxiety levels using our Stress Pulse to ensure immediate support at critical times, as well as provide tech-based solutions to help employees manage work performance and output when working remotely.

Maintaining health and wellness by reducing stress is one of the key strategies that will get us through this time.

Stay Well,

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CEO and Founder

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