

# Anxiety and Stress Can be Enemies of Your Immune System



**Some anxiety is a normal part of life.** In the short term, anxiety increases your breathing and heart rate, concentrating blood flow to your brain, where you need it. This very physical response is preparing you for an intense situation. With occasional stress, your body returns to normal functioning when the stress passes.

With the ongoing news of the coronavirus, you may repeatedly feel anxious and stressed. When this occurs, your body doesn't get a signal to return to normal functioning. This can weaken your immune system, leaving you more vulnerable to viral infections and frequent illnesses. Anxiety's physical effects can certainly be counter productive as we look at the most effective ways to combat this recent Coronavirus outbreak!

Everyone is different when it comes to managing anxiety and stress. Just because running is helpful to your friend, it may not work for you. It's important to find something that works for you.

That might mean trying a lot of different things. Here are a few ideas:

## 1. Unplug

- Take time each day to play, participate in hobbies and enjoy the company of family and friends (unless they are ill).
- Create a dedicated space to actively remove yourself from a stressful day and relax.
- Go for a walk and enjoy nature.
- Limit the time you spend watching the news.

## 2. Practice Relaxation

- Practice Yoga, relaxation, mindfulness and/or meditation. Stay in the present moment and stop ruminating on the "worst case scenarios". Here's a great "how to" resource:  
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/six-relaxation-techniques-to-reduce-stress>
- Release tension through stretching and deep breathing

## 3. Exercise

- The more active you are, the more active your immune system tends to be. The key is to exercise regularly but don't overdo it.

## 4. Get good sleep

- Establish a healthy sleep routine and get the optimum 7-9 hours of sleep each night. While you sleep, your body releases proteins that are necessary when fighting infection.





### **5. Stay hydrated**

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Most health experts suggest 8, 8 ounce glasses a day (8 X 8). Staying hydrated helps your body naturally eliminate toxins that may cause illness.

### **6. Think Positive**

- Be open to humor. Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times.
- Surround yourself with positive people.
- Practice positive self-talk. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself.
- Think about the things you are thankful for.

### **7. Eat healthy**

- Eat a rainbow of fruits and vegetables to maximize nutritional value.
- Limit refined sugars, caffeine, alcohol and processed foods.

Chronic anxiety can be a vortex that turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy when it's left unchecked. Managing anxiety can increase your odds of maintaining and even boosting your immune system. And remember, it's OK to ask for help. That personal connection can be key to overcoming stress and anxiety. A Best Care EAP counselor is available by calling (800) 801-4182 or email us at [eap@BestCareEAP.org](mailto:eap@BestCareEAP.org). Confidential sessions are available in person, over the phone and online.