COVID-19 & MENTAL HEALTH

According to recent polling conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, nearly half (45%) of U.S. adults reported their mental health had "been negatively impacted due to worry and stress over the virus."

**May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and in the midst of this global pandemic, it's more important than ever to familiarize yourself with the signs of mental health illnesses, be proactive about coping strategies, and seek out resources when needed.** It's also important to look for warnings signs in friends and family members. Older adults and children may be particularly at-risk for feelings of anxiety or depression during these uncertain times.

**Recognize the Symptoms:** While we can all expect to experience feelings of worry and uncertainty in regards to the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, if these feelings persist for several days, or begin to impact your quality of life or activities of daily living, it may be time to seek help. Familiarize yourself with warning signs for children, adolescents, adults, and older adults on the CDC's COVID-19 Stress and Coping website. And remember, Mercer's Employee Assistance program is available to you 24 hours per day at no-cost.

**Be Proactive:** When it comes to mental health, prioritize your self-care. Strengthen social connections by calling friends and family, engage regularly in activities you enjoy, and check-out the wealth of resources available on Mental Health America's Tools 2 Thrive Toolkit.

**Create Healthy Routines:** While life during the pandemic may look far different than life pre-pandemic, it's important to establish healthy routines. Maintaining schedules and dedicating time each day for physical activity, healthy meals, and connection with others is critical. Now can be a great time to create new healthy habits by adding them on to existing routines. For example, try adding a 5 minute meditation after your morning cup of coffee, or join one of our Wellness virtual workouts each Monday-Friday at noon.

**WELLNESS IN BRIEF: GET OUTSIDE**

According to health experts, roughly 50% of Americans don't make enough Vitamin D, due in large part to spending too much time indoors. Along with Vitamin D, spending time outside in the sun has been linked with improved mood and better sleep. Just 20 minutes per day can make a big difference. Get out there!

**OBESITY & COVID-19**

In a pre-print journal article published in April, researchers analyzing COVID-19 patients who required hospitalization in New York City found that after age, obesity was one of the most significant risk factors for poor health outcomes associated with the virus. While more research is needed to establish a link between obesity and poorer health outcomes for COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), includes obesity in their list of high risk individuals. According to Dr Jennifer Lighter, epidemiologist at New York University, "BMI is the Achilles' heel for American patients", especially for patients under the age of 60.

**If you are obese, now is the time to lose weight.** Small changes such as reducing consumption of ultraprocessed foods and sugar sweetened beverages, as well as increasing daily physical activity can make big differences. Looking for support? Contact Wellness to learn about our personalized weight loss coaching program.

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