

Working Well: Tips for staying psychologically well during heavy workload periods

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As the situation with COVID-19 continues to evolve, PHSA staff have had to adapt to constantly changing circumstances and in many cases, handle a heavier workload. Here are some tips to help manage stress, elevate mood, and maintain resiliency during intense work periods:

1. Take micro-breaks

Take a step back when things get too intense. Short breaks such as getting a tea, getting a breath of fresh air, or simply looking away from your computer for a few minutes gives the mind a needed break. Micro-breaks also provide postural relief.

2. Use mindfulness techniques

Mindfulness is a clinically proven tool to reduce stress, maintain resiliency, and reduce reactivity. It even strengthens neural connections in our brain that foster self-awareness and mental control. Watch this two minute video of [Dr. Vo's STOP mindfulness technique](#) for a mindfulness example. Read [PHSA's Mindfulness Resources](#).

3. Breathing

Three deep breaths can do wonders to clear the mind. Try it now!

4. Make social connections a priority, especially virtually via video

Social interaction, however brief, with colleagues or those who care is an effective way to calm the nervous system and relieve stress. When we socialize with others who are supportive, neurons in our brain have a mirroring effect that help us adopt a calmer disposition.

Walking meetings, while maintaining physical distancing

For meetings or portions of meetings where a computer isn't required, have the meeting conversation outdoors on your phone during a walk around the neighbourhood. Make sure to maintain physical distancing if you're walking with a colleague.

5. Stay active

Physical activity can have a significant, positive impact on mental health and relieve stress, improve memory, and help improve quality of sleep. Check out the [Curtis Health Online Fitness](#)

[Resources](#) (password is Health to access these fitness resources for PHSA staff).

6. Stretch breaks / movement breaks / yoga

Take a five minute stretch break to reset the mind and help reduce the impact of sitting in a chair for prolonged periods of time. Join PHSA's virtual yoga classes starting on Thursday March 26 from 12:00 p.m. to 12:20 p.m. [via Zoom](#).

7. Eat a brain-healthy diet to support mental wellness

Eating well is important for preventing sugar crashes and cravings that can place stress on the mind and body. Also, foods rich in Omega-3s, such as nuts, avocados, beans, leafy greens, and fresh fruit have been proven to boost mood.

8. Sleep hygiene

Busy work periods are a crucial time to maintain good sleep habits, such as having regular sleep hours, omitting screen time before bedtime, and having a calming bedtime routine. Here are some guidelines for a better sleep, and a checklist to ensure a good night's sleep. Progressive muscle relaxation is also a useful technique for relaxing and falling asleep.

9. Maintain perspective

Keep in mind that "this too shall pass". This intense work period is likely temporary and will not last forever. For those experiencing compassion fatigue, see the LearningHub course on [Understanding and Addressing Compassion fatigue](#).

10. Appeal to your senses

Does listening to an uplifting song make you feel calm? Or does tactile stimulation from a fidget toy help reduce stress? Everyone responds to sensory input a little differently, so start experimenting now to find what works best for you.

11. Embrace laughter

Try to look for the humour in life. Laughter really can be the best medicine.

What should you do if your stress reactions don't diminish from week to week?

It's best to not keep the worrying thoughts and anxieties all to yourself. If you are experiencing a high state of stress for prolonged periods, don't hesitate to contact [PHSA's Employee & Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\) provider](#), Homewood Health, to speak with a counsellor.

- PHSA Staff Psychosocial Support Service: 604-875-2982 or Email: <mailto:mworkplacewellness@cw.bc.ca>.
- You can access the Workplace Wellness Staff Psychosocial Support Service to have a confidential, supportive conversation that can be helpful in exploring coping strategies related to unique and common experiences related to coping with COVID-19. The Staff Supporters are PHSA staff members who are trained professionals with backgrounds in Psychology, Counselling, Social Work and Psychiatry.

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- Homewood Health: 1-800-663-1142 or at www.homeweb.ca
Homewood Health offers free and confidential coaching and counselling services for all PHSA staff for a variety of life balance challenges. Services can be in person, by telephone, or online (video or chat).
- [Homewood Health's Health & Wellness Library](#): This library is a collection of resources written by qualified experts.
- Anxiety Canada's free online resources: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/free-downloadable-pdf-resources/>. For those experiencing persistent stress or heightened anxiety, Anxiety Canada has many free downloadable resources.

PHSA's Psychological Health and Safety team supports the mental health of all employees in any PHSA program, service, or division. To learn more about the programs and services available to staff, visit us on [POD](#) or at PHSA.ca. Questions? Email healthpromotion@phsa.ca.