A millennial's guide to mental wellbeing during a pandemic

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In the midst of all the "wash your hands", "disinfect your stations" and "maintain safe distances" during a pandemic, phrases like "Take care of your mental health" may sound redundant. But factually, it is more relevant in the context of a constant state of anxiety and panic. The spread of COVID-19 and the damages due to this may be irrecoverable in terms of social, economic and humanitarian issues. But psychologists and mental health experts are also concerned that quarantine and social distancing could potentially lead to more severe mental health issues for the millennials and the generations after.

According to a 2019 report from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, major depression diagnoses are rising at a faster rate for millennials — a 47% increase since 2013 — compared to any other age group and they are by and large the most anxious generation. Feeling lonely or fearing that a close family member might get infected are two of the most common concerns one may feel during social isolation and quarantine. Some people may have also developed a complex coping mechanism subconsciously; being in denial or the bliss from ignorance. However, the coronavirus dangers are real and anxiety-inducing distractions make it too easy for millennials (even those with pre-existing issues) to overlook mental health implications.

During such a tumultuous time, adopting certain strategies to protect your mental health, or to prevent it from worsening, will not only help you embrace uncertainty and variables beyond your control, but it will also make your loved ones and your community much stronger.

Take time to reflect your feelings
Social distancing, isolation and working from home can be a dreadful experience for some if it is continued indefinitely. But it does offer you space and opportunity to focus on yourself and your feelings. Ignorance about how you feel during a crisis might affect productivity and your future performance. "Look at what really happened and what needs to be done. Don't build a story around it. And you'll realise that there is nothing to be stressed about. There's only an incident or an action needed," says Dr. Anshula Verma, an Indian psychologist on the issue of managing stress during a pandemic. Research from the last SARS outbreak revealed that even individuals who were quarantined during the epidemic developed symptoms suggestive of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or clinical depression as a result of the emotional trauma of being isolated from society for a prolonged period. The study showed that the longer the quarantine period, the more likely a person was likely to develop a diagnosable mental health condition in the future. So, if you are feeling sad, anxious, stressed, confused or lonely, understand that it's okay to be feeling so.

Eat. Sleep. Stay fit. Repeat.
The drastic shift in our daily lives has messed up the routine we followed daily. Starting from our sleep cycle, food habits, and the physical movement to our social interactions, everything has altered its normal course of occurrence. Even before the restrictive conditions were announced, physical inactivity cost 5.3 million lives a year globally. Stay close to your normal routine by maintaining some semblance of structure from your

pre-quarantine days. The end goal during self-isolation is to prevent long term physical and mental health damage by sitting less, moving as often as possible, and aiming to maintain fitness by huffing and puffing a few times a day.

Stay connected
One US psychologist rightly noted rather than talking about social distancing, we should be practising 'distant socialising'. Isolation during a pandemic only means keeping a physical distance from people. According to studies, loneliness can be as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. So, don't isolate yourself completely. Keep in touch with friends, family, neighbours and even your co-workers. Do it through Skype, phone calls, texting, email or any other form of digital communication. Ask how they're doing and let them know how *you're* doing. Offer support, love, and encouragement. Staying connected can help you manage negative emotions and guard you against any unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Focus only on the things you CAN control
With so much uncertainty and a virus in the air, you need to accept that there's not much you can control. So, the most important thing you should be focusing on right now is ensuring the safety of yourself and those around you. This only means maintaining good hygiene by washing hands more often, using sanitizers, covering your mouth while coughing, staying at home and keeping your immune system strong by maintaining a healthy diet. Stay informed about what's happening through reliable sources ONLY, such as the CDC and World Health Organization (WHO). But

be sure to limit your media intake if it's making you too anxious or stressed. It is never wise to panic during a pandemic.
Seek professional help
Managing negative emotions and ensuring better mental health can be tough to achieve in these trying times. And so, knowing when to seek help is also important. An online group of psychologists has emerged to help people suffering from stress due to the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh. People can be connected with the group through the Facebook page 'Corona Shankat: Joruri Manusik Swastha Seba' (Corona Crisis: Emergency Mental health service). Faisal Ahmed Rafi, CEO of bdlisteners, a mental health platform, is leading the programme and Roufun Naher, a teacher of the Dhaka University's Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, is supervising the team. Psychologist Roufun said those who have previous mental health issues or risk factors are 'more vulnerable' in this time of crisis. "If such anxiety and the vulnerability out of the crisis persist for a long time, then it'll turn to a mental disorder. That's why we have taken this step to prevent upcoming mental health disasters," she said about the group, adding that international mental health practitioners and trainers are also connected with them. They are offering free mental health support with their team of experts through audio call, video call, chat or texting since people have to stay at home now.

All their services are based on virtual platforms currently.

To contact them, call - 01515625217 and 01730443737 - for more information.