



LIFELINK

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Coping with Stress, Uncertainty During Crisis

The brave men and women of the U.S. Navy are facing an unprecedented challenge with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the uncertainty and risk, Sailors continue to protect the nation with integrity and excellence.

The pandemic is a threat to physical health, but it can also take a toll on psychological and behavioral health. Research indicates individuals may be at higher risk of suicide or other harmful behaviors during times of crisis.

According to the **World Health Organization**, it's common for individuals to feel stressed or worried in any epidemic. Specific stressors from the COVID-19 outbreak could also be problematic, including fear of being infected or infecting others, worry about children or other loved ones having appropriate care or support and economic concerns.

For Sailors on the frontlines of the crisis response, there are additional stressors. Higher demands at work and fear of passing the virus to family members are some of the things our Sailors may face.

In addition, almost everyone will be affected by social distancing in some way. While strong **connection** is a protective factor for our behavioral health, distancing can strain or deteriorate relationships.

On a positive note, however, some people may have experiences during the pandemic that build resilience and coping. When faced with crisis, communities can bond together. Volunteerism and altruism may be high, creating purpose and satisfaction.

No matter what events unfold as we navigate the pandemic, people can take steps now to support their psychological and physical health. The Navy Suicide Prevention Branch offers these tips for remaining positive during uncertain times.

Reach out to your support network. Since **social distancing** continues to be recommended by federal public health professionals, it is important to determine new and creative ways to connect with your loved ones.

Consider setting up regular times to video chat with your friends, plan virtual dinner dates with your long-distance partner or organize a digital happy hour with your friends or colleagues. You can also do a workout routine with a shipmate over a video chat and send funny photos or memes to your friends to let them



know you care. For more:

- **15 Simple Ways to Show Someone You Care**
- **Relationship Goals: Using the Principles of Resilience to Jumpstart Connections with Others**

Maintain your healthy habits. If your typical work and family routine feels disrupted, remain flexible in upholding your established activities. Go on walks for fresh air and cook meals with your family. Reframe this time as an opportunity to even develop new practices to improve your well-being. Be kind to yourself and others when adjusting to new schedules. For more:

- **Think You Need Equipment to Exercise? Think again!**
- **Fueling Your Body and Mind with Food**

Practice mindfulness. With the news changing every day, it may feel like you've lost a sense of control over your psychological and emotional wellness. Take time to push pause and cultivate gratitude for the little joys in life. Relish in small, positive tasks like reading a book or writing a letter to a loved one. You may have more time to dedicate to activities that fall by the wayside during your normal daily responsibilities. For more:

- **How to Get Started Journaling**
- **How (and Why) to Develop a Self-Care Plan**



Lifelink Spotlight

Caregivers, Providers Must Pace to Stay Resilient and Avoid Burnout

Editor's Note: The following article was written by Kelly Blasko, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and the lead for mobile health clinical integration at the Defense Health Agency Connected Health Branch.

Remember before the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, when we all thought we were stressed out? Me neither. Since cases started erupting earlier this year, it feels like everyone is in crisis mode 24/7.

The relentless pace, mounting tension and general uncertainty are already taking their toll. Clinicians, medics, nurses, technologists and technicians inside the Military Health System and out are facing burnout, including compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress. Our response to COVID-19 is a marathon, not a sprint. One of the best things we can do is to pace ourselves and use self-care practices and tools. That is how we can stay resilient enough to win in the long run. If we don't take care of ourselves when we need it, we can't give others the best possible care when they need it.

You can start pacing your work activity and including self-care with these three easy steps:

- **Recognize the signs of burnout:** Four of the most common are anxiety, low mood, irritability, disengagement and exhaustion.
- **Take self-care breaks when you see the signs.** Distract yourself briefly (10 minutes is fine) with activities that increase your happiness and peace of mind.
- **Cultivate a positive work environment.** We're all in this together and it's important we lift each other up. Positive words for teamwork, kudos, praise, recognition can't be overused in this current state.

Self-care means something different for everyone, and we want to help you in any way we can during the COVID-19 pandemic. Defense Health Agency has free, evidence-based digital health tools developed by psychologists specifically designed to promote self-care, including the following apps:

- **Virtual Hope Box** contains personalized tools to help you with positive coping, through relaxation, distraction and connecting to others in a time of need. (Available in the App Store and Google Play)
- **Breathe2Relax** teaches diaphragmatic breathing to de-escalate stress. (Available in the App Store and Google Play)
- The **Military Meditation Coach Podcast** teaches relaxation exercises and tips to keep mental health on track.

Driven by our mission to serve, we are used to giving our all, every day. It is hard to pull back – even temporarily – when circumstances demand so much of us, but we must. The way we will get through this is to take care of ourselves and each other.

Plan of the Week Notes

Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of April:

1. As we work to minimize Sailors' exposure to COVID-19 and adhere to social distancing, we must be mindful that while many of our shipmates are adept at maintaining their support networks through social media, for some social distancing may lead to a loss of connection and feelings of isolation. In addition to the resources available at the unit and installation level, there are also support options available 24/7 for teleworking personnel. Military Crisis Line offers 24/7 confidential and toll-free support for service members and veterans in crisis. Reach Military Crisis Line by calling 1-800-273-TALK (option 1), text 838255 or visit www.militarycrisisline.net. Also available is Military OneSource, which offers confidential non-medical counseling to service members and families. Call 1-800-342-9647 or visit www.militaryonesource.mil.
2. April is Alcohol Awareness Month, and awareness is key. Sometimes people turn to alcohol to relax or ease anxiety, but the quick fix can actually increase stress and lead to other issues. Get tips on healthier ways to chill out from the Own Your Limits campaign at <https://www.ownyourlimits.org/alcohol-and-your-life/physical-health/relieve-stress/>.
3. April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month (SAAPM). The theme for SAAPM 2020 is "Protecting Our People Protects Our Mission." We all have a role in preventing sexual assault. Learn more and access resources at <https://www.sapr.mil/saapm>.
4. Sleep is critical to emotional well-being and health, and yet, going to sleep and staying asleep is easier said than done sometimes. Unwind with a book, write down your thoughts or meditate if you are having trouble maintaining a healthy sleep schedule. Get more tips on the NavyNavStress blog at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/>.
5. Navy Chaplain Care communications are 100 percent confidential unless the service member decides otherwise. Call 1-855-NAVY-311 to request chaplain support or visit <http://www.navy.mil/local/chaplaincorps/> for help.

News and Resources

Caring for the Caregivers of
TBI Patients
[Health.mil](#)

Resources to Support Mental
Health and Coping with the
Coronavirus
[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Addressing Emotional
Responses to the Threat of
Coronavirus
[Psychological Health Center of
Excellence](#)

Taking Care of Your Mental
Health in the Face of
Uncertainty
[American Foundation for Suicide
Prevention](#)

Lethal Means and Suicide
Prevention
[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Action Alliance Forms Service
Members, Veterans and Their
Families Advisory Group
[National Action Alliance](#)

April is Reproductive and
Sexual Health Month
[Navy and Marine Corps Public Health
Center](#)

Homemade Fitness
[Human Performance Resources by
Champ](#)

Resources for Suicide Loss
Survivors
[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Sample 7-Day Meal Plan
[Human Performance Resources by
Champ](#)

Mental Health Considerations
During COVID-19 Outbreak
[World Health Organization](#)

Current and Upcoming Events

SPC Training Webinars

April 16, 1PM CDT
April 30, 6PM CDT
[Register here](#)

We Need to Talk About Alcohol and Suicide

*Editor's Note: The following article was published on the **Own Your Limits** website. Own Your Limits is the Department of Defense's educational campaign for responsible drinking. The campaign offers resources to Service members as well as for professionals who support, educate or work with Service members.*

April is Alcohol Abuse Prevention Month. Alcohol use comes with **risks**. Risks to your health, to your relationships and one risk we don't talk about as often: suicide.

No one situation or event leads to suicide. The factors of suicide are complex, and may involve things like family history, mental health, relationship challenges and prolonged stress. If you're a Service member, other risks may include a lack of advancement or career setback, feeling like honor was lost, an injury or health issue or a recent return from a deployment. Deployments, TDYs/TADs and PCS may cause stress due to loss of connection with family or friends, time away from home or changes to your 'day-to-day'.

While alcohol does not cause suicide, it can play a role. Some say it is the second largest risk factor for suicide and suicide attempts, right after depression. People who are thinking about suicide often turn to alcohol.

Rather than helping, alcohol can increase thoughts of suicide. Here's how:

- When you drink, you make snap decisions without much thought. This is because alcohol slows down the part of your brain that controls your thoughts, movement, speech, memory and messages between your brain and body. You are less able to solve problems and may have trouble seeing a positive future for yourself. This leads to more dark thoughts.
- To try and forget your problems, you may drink a lot and unknowingly distance or cut yourself off from your unit, friends or family. These are the people who can be most supportive during hard times.

Think about it. You may be in a situation where you are going through a tough time. Perhaps you aren't sure how to make things better and you start drinking more. The alcohol can cloud your thinking and pretty soon, you may see suicide as the easiest or only way out.

But there is help... and hope. Seeking help when you need it is a sign of strength and there are many ways to get help.

If you are having thoughts of suicide, you can speak with someone confidentially and anonymously. Call the Military Crisis Line, 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text a message to 838255. You can also start a **confidential online chat session**.

