

Managing Mental Health as an International Student During the Coronavirus Outbreak

A crisis like this can affect almost every aspect of one's life: one's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, relationships, physical reactions, and beliefs.

You may be feeling:

- *Anxious about so much uncertainty and so many changes in your life, including not knowing how the pandemic may impact your stay in the U.S., not knowing when this crisis will end, and transitioning to online courses*

These feelings are normal, and expected given this stressful situation. Some things that may help include:

- ✓ **Keep a Regular Routine**—shower and get dressed for online classes, eat and go to bed at regular times, take any medications consistently, and try using a planner to schedule your day.
 - ✓ **Focus on the things that are in your control**—wash your hands, limit your consumption of news to reliable sources like www.cdc.gov and www.who.int/en, limit your use of alcohol and drugs.
 - ✓ **Get outside in nature.** Exercise helps both your physical and mental health, and fresh air and sunshine can make your world feel a lot bigger right now.
 - ✓ **Try to stay in the present moment.** When you notice yourself worrying try to take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate to gently bring yourself back to the present moment. Focus on the sights, sounds, tastes and other sensory experiences happening right now, and name them or try one of the other relaxation techniques below.
 - ✓ **Reach out and connect with others.** If you are feeling particularly anxious or sad, or if you are struggling with your mental health in any way, please reach out to CMHS at 617-627-3360 for more resources and help finding a mental health professional referral. For students already overseas please see the support resources section below.
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- *Fearful about either being stuck in the US due to travel restrictions, what it will be like returning to the situation in your home country, or whether travel will be dangerous right now*
 - ✓ **Contact supports.** The International Center, the FIRST Center, Tufts Mutual Aid, your embassy, your CMHS clinician, (and others) can help you understand what your options are, and what travel and financial support you may be eligible for.
 - ✓ **Consider the following travel tips to limit exposure during air travel.** Check in for flights online from home beforehand, eat before you get to the airport or pack your own snacks, try and stay 6 feet apart from other travelers when possible, skip browsing in airport shops, and choose a window seat if possible and wipe down your seat when boarding.

- *Fearful about social isolation if your housemates already have left campus and you are living alone, or eating alone in the dining halls*
 - ✓ **Schedule regular times to talk with others.** Use video chat like FaceTime, Skype, What's App, Facebook Messenger, or phone or text for those who may not have access to video chat.
 - ✓ **Plan some virtual socializing.** "Meet" a friend for a home workout, walk outside or a meal together online, or use Netflix's new "Netflix Party" to watch a show or movie together.
 - ✓ **Participate in online communities.** Look into groups focused on your hobbies and interests (knitting, CrossFit, video games, art, LARP, cooking, etc.)
 - ✓ **Consider joining online faith communities.** Listen to live or recorded services, or reach out to the chaplaincy for further support: <https://chaplaincy.tufts.edu>
 - ✓ **Stay active in your recovery from alcohol or drugs.** Make sure to access online support groups, stay in touch with your sponsor if you have one, or access some of the options here: <https://students.tufts.edu/health-and-wellness/health-promotion/alcohol-and-drug-awareness/resources-students-recovery>

- *Grief over so many losses, given that your college semester ended so suddenly*
 - ✓ **The best way to get through grieving is to allow yourself to do it.** There is no right or wrong length of time that it will take for you to not feel sad about your Tufts experience ending, though talking to others who are going through the same thing may help you to move through it.
 - ✓ **Express yourself.** Journal, draw, paint or make other kinds of art—all of these can be helpful ways to process and express what may be hard to put into words.

- *Distress around dealing with discrimination related to the misinformation shared around coronavirus and how the disease has spread.*
 - ✓ **Share your fears.** Speak with others who understand and can empathize—friends or family in your community, your therapist or online community.
 - ✓ **Channel anxiety into action.** When we are anxious about things outside of our control (like the behavior of others) one way to empower ourselves is to proactively respond in ways that feel safe. That might mean sharing information around stigma and the hurt it causes on social media, talking to friends about how they can be allies in challenging racist behavior, or organizing relief efforts for your community.
 - ✓ **Access media that "gets you."** Use resources like [Meditation for Black, Indigenous and People of Color](#)

Support Resources

Support Resources In the US:

- The Crisis Text Line: text TALK to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (voice call) at 1-800-273-TALK or chat option here: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>
- SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline: Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990 (English).
 - ✓ Callers to the hotline can also connect with counselors in over 100 other languages via 3rd-party interpretation services; to connect with a counselor in your primary language, simply indicate your preferred language to the responding counselor and she/he will connect to a live interpreter (interpretation in less commonly-spoken languages may require calling back at an appointed time).
 - ✓ SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746
 - ✓ SMS (español): "Hablanos" al 66746
- Finding a therapist in the US:
 - ✓ tufts.thrivingcampus.com
 - ✓ www.psychologytoday.com
 - ✓ <https://www.therapyden.com>
 - ✓ <http://www.innopsych.com/findatherapist>
 - ✓ <https://zencare.co/locations>
 - ✓ <https://www.betterhelp.com/united/> (Online therapy, free for students with Tufts insurance)
 - ✓ <https://www.ihopenetwork.com>
 - ✓ Consult with CMHS if necessary for more assistance: <http://students.tufts.edu/health-and-wellness/counseling-and-mental-health>

Outside of the US:

- Some information may be out of date but some options for crisis support overseas:
 - ✓ <https://togetherweare-strong.tumblr.com/helpline>
 - ✓ <https://www.psycom.net/get-help-mental-health>
 - ✓ <https://faq.whatsapp.com/en/android/28030010/>
 - ✓ https://www.suicidestop.com/call_a_hotline.html
- For seeking a therapist overseas
 - ✓ <https://internationaltherapistdirectory.com/>
 - ✓ <http://www.psychologymatters.asia>
 - ✓ Reach out to local hospitals, health centers, or your embassy and ask for a referral for counseling or psychiatry if needed.

Four Relaxation Techniques to Try

Deep Breathing

Of the many ways you can rev up or slow down the body, the only activity that you can consciously control is your breathing. If you purposefully focus on calming your breath, the brain interprets this as a sign that you are relatively safe. This will allow you to think logically, feel calmer, and reduce the impact of trauma symptoms while assessing which other coping skills to use next. Self-regulating skills are best used for at least 15 minutes, however, even just one or two minutes can have a positive impact.

To begin, it is important to make sure you are engaging in deep belly breathing. To do so, imagine filling up your chest, lungs, and stomach with air. It can be helpful to place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly when you practice, so that you can notice your hands' movement and assess the depth of your breathing.

Once you've practiced filling up your belly with air, try this activity. Breathe in through your nose deeply for a count of three, hold your breath for a count of five, and then breathe out through pursed lips slowly for a count of seven. Repeat this exercise five times, and notice any changes that you feel.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

To begin, close your eyes or focus your gaze gently on a spot in front of you. Now bring your awareness to the very top of your head. Notice your scalp and your forehead. Are your muscles tight or your forehead scrunched up? For a moment, just notice how this area of your body feels. Next, intentionally squeeze and hold the muscles at the top of your head for a count of five, and then relax the muscles. Continue this practice of noticing, squeezing, and releasing as you move all the way down your body. From your forehead, move down to your cheeks and jaw, your neck and shoulders, your arms and hands, your torso and tummy, your gluts, your thighs and calves, and finally your feet. Finish with three deep breaths and then open your eyes and/or bring your attention back to the room. You may also want to try the recording here: <https://students.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/PMRandSleep.mp3>

Container Exercise

To begin, picture an empty container. Think about its qualities, such as shape, color, size, material, texture, scent. Make sure that the container has a mechanism that allows you to open and close it, which may be a lock, latch, digital key pad, or something else. Next, imagine putting all of the things weighing you down or causing you stress into the container, and feel comforted knowing that no matter how many stressors you are managing at this time, the container is big enough to hold all of them. You can place them in, put them in, have them sucked in by a magnet or whatever feels right to you. Next, imagine closing the container. Then picture the container shrinking down until it is small and light enough to fit into the palm of your hand. Pick a spot in the room to leave the container so that you don't have to carry it with you throughout your day. Know that you can return to the spot where you left the container at any time, and that it can be opened again if you choose.

Safe Place

Visualize a safe, peaceful place. It can be real or one that you imagine, but no matter where, know that this space is entirely safe for you. Picture a space with a calming atmosphere, and one where you do not have any negative memories attached. Some people use a beach, a dock by a lake or the woods but you can use whatever place works for you.

Use your mind to explore the space. Notice that the space has a scent that you find calming. Notice too that the space is just the right temperature for you to feel comfortable. Can you hear any noises, perhaps birds singing, or your favorite song?

Think of things in your life that have provided you with a sense of safety and happiness, and notice which of these things are already present in this space, or if you would like to add them now (e.g., a pet, a trusted friend, or a comfort object).

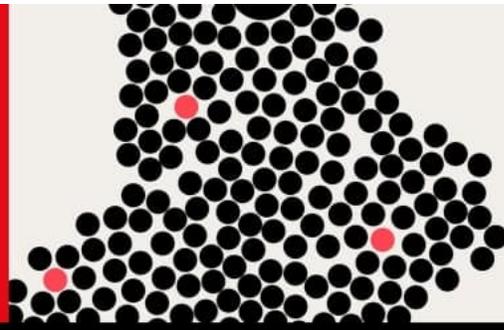
For now, it is time to say goodbye to this space and return to the present. Know that this space still exists inside your own mind and that you can access it at any time, and that the space will be just as ready and welcoming as it was during your first visit. When you feel ready, start to wiggle your toes in your shoes, stretch out your neck, and open your eyes.

Useful Mental Health Apps:

Sometimes self-care is easier said than done, but fortunately, with the power of technology, there's literally an app for everything. If you're having trouble sleeping or simply calming your mind, check out some of the apps below.

- ✓ www.calm.com
- ✓ www.headspace.com
- ✓ Andrew Johnson has a number of apps and MP3s that may be useful including ones specifically for managing anxiety, dealing with insomnia, and panic attacks:
<https://www.withandrewjohnson.com>
- ✓ <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/kardia-deep-breathing/id998569123>

**Anxious
about the
coronavirus?**



**We're here
to help you
cope.**

**To reach our
Crisis Counselors,
text MHFA
to **741741**.**

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

