



Resilience - a key to wellness

Resilience is commonly defined as the ability to recover from life's challenges or bounce back when hard things happen. But resilience is more than that. Resilience is flexible responsiveness. It's the difference between reacting when something troubling happens, and being calm enough to choose your response. Different than endurance or grit, resilience isn't about toughening up and pushing hard. Pushing without pausing actually depletes us, ultimately making us more fragile and vulnerable to stress and trauma. Resilience is knowing when you need to rest and resting effectively.

This toolkit offers practical resources that may assist you in responding to the current situation in a way that will support your psychological health.

Resilience – A Key to Well-being

When so much ‘doom and gloom’ conversation surrounds us these days, it’s hard for even the most optimistic among us to stay positive. Although we need to take the coronavirus health crisis seriously, it’s counterproductive for us to stay focused on negativity.



Obviously, you need to stay informed about how to keep yourself and others healthy and safe during the coronavirus outbreak, but you don’t need to become an expert on COVID-19, nor do you need to expose yourself to unpleasant facts and information every waking hour. Instead, focusing on positive things will help you get the energy you need to manage your immediate challenges and prepare for the future.

The following suggestions may help you find ways to keep calm, find joy, and enhance your psychological well-being.



Prioritize Relationships

Connect. Leverage [audio and video technology](#) to stay in touch with others. Take and share photos and videos to capture moments that may otherwise be missed. Connect with empathetic and understanding people to remind you that you’re not alone.

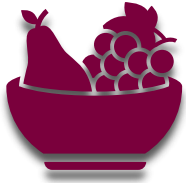
Teach your kids a new skill. Use extra time with your family to teach your children those skills we often don’t get to share in the era of over-scheduling and helicopter parenting: cooking, laundry, and balancing finances. These lessons will make them more resilient as they get older and move away from home.

Send gifts in the mail. It may not be wise to drop in on your loved ones with some fresh-baked goodies, so send them a card or gift in the mail. Unexpected treats can be a huge pick-me-up-in times of stress. This is especially valuable to those who may be isolated and vulnerable.

Look after your neighbours. The act of checking in on them (keeping [social distancing](#) in mind, of course) will not only make them feel good, it will make you feel good too!

Practice random acts of kindness. Leave a little gift for the delivery person who drops off your supplies outside your door. Comment on a colleague’s LinkedIn post. Send a snail-mail note of appreciation to a friend or colleague. Thank our McMaster colleagues who supporting individuals on campus because their job doesn’t allow them to work from home. Think of those who could benefit from your thoughtfulness and generosity. Then act.

Foster Well-being



Take care of your body. Self-care is a legitimate practice for mental health and building resilience. That's because stress is just as much physical as it is emotional. Promoting positive lifestyle factors like proper nutrition, ample sleep, hydration and regular exercise can strengthen your body to adapt to stress and reduce the toll of emotions like anxiety or depression.

Sleep. Sleep is a vital indicator of overall health and well-being. You spend up to one-third of your life asleep, and the overall state of your "sleep health" remains an essential question throughout your lifespan. [Health Canada recommendations](#) 7-9 hours of sleep per night for adults. Tips to help you sleep better include:

- Avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine before bed
- Maintaining a regular bedtime/waketime
- Practicing relaxation and mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques
- Reducing noise in the sleeping environment
- Exercising regularly
- Reviewing medications with your physician/pharmacist regularly

Stay hydrated. Water keeps every part of your body working properly. It helps your body flush wastes and stay at the right temperature. You need to replace lost fluid to stay healthy. Experts recommend six to eight 8-oz glasses of fluid a day. If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, sick or exercise intensely, you may need more fluid.

Keep physically fit. During a pandemic, you may not be able to enjoy your usual level of physical activity. However, it is important to exercise your body and stretch out tense muscles. One thing that is still available to you is nature – just be sure you maintain social distancing. Studies show that spending time in nature, whether you are hiking or gardening, positively affects your psychological health. By taking care of yourself, you will be better prepared to deal with situations that require resilience. Another option is to use [free live-streaming workout classes](#) being offered by 'big name' fitness centres right now. Some of these include Orangetheory, Gold's Gym, Blink Fitness, Crunch Fitness, LA Fitness, Lifetime Fitness, Equinox, 24 Hour Fitness and others. Enjoy your workout!

Minimize trips to the grocery store and eat healthy. During the pandemic (and every day, really), [make nutrition and health a priority](#). Before you head to the grocery store, plan ahead to reduce the number of trips you need to make. Visualize breakfast, lunch, and dinner for at least 5 days. Make a shopping list—and use it! You'll be less like to forget items or buy impulse items. When possible, stock up on nutrition-packed foods that will stay fresh for a week or longer.

Practice mindfulness. [Mindful journaling](#), yoga, and other practices like prayer or meditation can also help people build connections and restore hope, which can help you deal with situations that require resilience. When you journal, meditate, or pray, ruminate on positive aspects of your life and recall the things you're grateful for, even during personal trials.



Embrace Healthy Thoughts

Limit your intake of negative news. Instead of being bombarded with the angst of the moment, choose a single news source and decide how much time you will spend with it each day. Then, stick to your plan.

Watch a funny video. Thanks to the huge popularity of YouTube, there are thousands of videos that can help you take your mind off current events, if only for three minutes at a time. Start to bookmark the funniest among them so you can return for a repeat viewing whenever things feel gloomy.

Maintain a hopeful outlook. It's hard to be positive when life isn't going your way. An optimistic outlook empowers you to expect that good things will happen to you. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Accept change. Accept that change is a part of life. Certain goals or ideals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations in your life. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Be thankful. Other simple practices could include practicing gratitude for our lives by simply counting or writing down three blessings at the end of each day.

Prioritize stress management strategies. Close your day, every day, with a positive acknowledgement of something you accomplished, learned or are grateful for. It will help dilute some of the negativity you've absorbed and remind you that not *everything* that's happening right now is bad or depressing.

Find Purpose



Help others. Whether you donate food or clothing to a local shelter or simply support a friend by connecting on the phone, you can garner a sense of purpose, foster self-worth, connect with other people and tangibly help others, all of which can empower you to grow in resilience.

Be proactive. It's helpful to acknowledge and accept your emotions during hard times, but it's also important to help you foster self-discovery by asking yourself, "What can I do about a problem in my life?" If the problems seem too big to tackle, break them down into manageable pieces. Taking initiative will remind you that you can muster motivation and purpose even during stressful periods of your life.

Move toward your goals. Develop some realistic goals and do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward the things you want to accomplish.

Useful Resources

LinkedIn Learning Courses

available free of charge to all McMaster staff and faculty – [learn more](#)

Building Resilience. Everyone wants to perform well when the pressure's on, but a lot of us withdraw in times of stress or adversity. If you can build your resilience, you'll have an easier time facing new challenges and earn a valuable skill to offer employers. In this course, the instructor outlines five training techniques to prepare for difficult situations, and five strategies for reflecting on them afterward. Find out where you are on the resilience scale, identify where you want to be, and learn strategies to close the gap.

Option B – Building Resilience. Dodging adversity is often not a choice. Encountering a devastating event – the gut-wrenching kind that zaps away joy—is an inevitability of life. The instructors in this course share their insights on building resilience in the face of such setbacks. They offer practical steps you can take to reimagine and rebuild your life when your first choice—your Option A—is no longer on the table, and you're faced with the task of making the absolute best of Option B. This course highlights some powerful topics, including how to talk to friends and colleagues who are hurting when you're not sure what to say, how to fight the idea that the hurt you're feeling is permanent, and how to give yourself permission to experience happiness again.

Homewood Health E-courses

available free of charge to all McMaster employees with extended health care benefits

Resilience. How can you turn life's challenges into opportunities? [This course](#) features video segments of a psychology expert and four people learning to become more resilient. The course features before-and-after testimonials, interviews with a psychologist, and step-by-step exercises.

Responsible Optimism. What makes positive thinking so powerful? Thinking optimistically, rather than negatively or pessimistically, is a proven key to avoiding feelings of depression, persisting longer at challenging tasks, and facing each day with hope and excitement. [This course](#) provides users with the tools they require to change their thinking.

Taking Control of Stress. Is there more to stress management than learning to relax? Most people feel that they are under “higher than normal” levels of stress and pressure. [This course](#) focuses on key stress management skills, including: managing thinking and feelings, time management, increasing positive experiences, getting active and relaxation.

Taking Control of your Mood. Feelings of sadness are normal but sometimes they are troublesome and require additional help. [This course](#) offers self-care strategies for improving sad moods, including: eating and sleeping well, managing thinking and feelings, increasing positive experiences, getting active and tension reduction.

Other Resources and Apps

McMaster Optimal Aging Portal. Your source for healthy aging information that you can trust, including great information about [staying active during a difficult time](#).

Enjoy Your Down Time. It's hard to be stuck indoors all the time, but try to find some creative ways to use your down time. Read that book that you just haven't gotten to, pull out those old board games, or try something new like taking a virtual tour of an [aquarium](#), [museum](#) or [zoo](#). So fun!

Find Your Calm. Sleep more. Stress less. Live better. This is an excellent resource that is available free of charge to everyone. [calm.com](#) has put together specific resources to help you prioritize your self-care during these uniquely stressful times. Enjoy free meditations, calming sounds and music, mindfulness resources, Calm masterclasses, and prompts to help you connect to others.

Random Acts of Kindness. Get inspired and [browse hundreds of ideas](#) on how you can spread kindness to others.

Sleep Cycle. If you want to learn *how* you sleep, [this app](#) might help. It tracks your sleep patterns and provides tips to optimize your snooze time. Just keep in mind that no sleep tracker is 100% accurate so if you're really struggling with your sleep, you may need to see a medical professional.

Homewood Health e-App. [This app](#) provides users access to treatment tools, resources and support so they can get the help they need, when they need it. e-AP includes access to a wealth of tools and resources on HomeWeb, one-touch phone access to Homewood's Client Services Centre and access to HomeChat (live chat).

Seek Help



The important thing to remember is that you are not alone on the journey. While you may not be able to control all of your circumstances, you can grow by focusing on the aspects of life's challenges you can manage with the support of loved ones and trusted professionals.

Reach out for professional assistance. If intense anxiety is preventing you from performing your job or other daily activities, consider contacting a professional for counselling support.

Employee and Family Assistance Program – [Homewood Health](#)
1-800-663-1142