



The week preceding and the week of final exams are always stressful for faculty and students. However this semester, due to the abrupt move to remote courses, the ongoing political strife, and a surging pandemic, many people are experiencing overwhelming uncertainty and stress. **This Teaching Tip will offer some simple measures to manage stress and protect your health.**

- **Take care of your mental health.** Pay attention to how you are feeling. “Whatever emotions or fears you are feeling right now, they are normal in a crisis, and you are not alone in them” (Pope-Ruark, 2020). One cognitive-behavioral strategy to decrease worrying is to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. For example, Melnyk (n.d.) suggests if you are having a negative thought (e.g., “I might get COVID and get really sick.”), change it to a positive thought (e.g., “I will stay healthy by taking care of myself and following infection control measures.”). To gain a small sense of control, identify simple tasks that you can complete each day such as organizing an electronic file or cleaning out a junk drawer (Thompson, 2020). Try taking five, slow, deep breaths to immediately produce a feeling of calm (Melnyk, n.d.). Visit Ohio State University’s [JustBreathe Center](#) to explore more breathing exercises. Also, try to get 7-9 hours of sleep each night. If you are having issues impacting your personal or work life, consider seeking help through [NMU's Employee Assistance Program](#).
- **Stay active physically.** Aim for 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week such as brisk walking (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). As we move into the winter months, now is a great time to explore online fitness resources and virtual classes (Thompson, 2020). Check out these [stay active at home](#) resources for adults and children. If you enjoy exercising outdoors, invest in proper clothing. According to NMU’s Nordic coach Sten Fjeldheim, “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing” (personal communication, November 12, 2020).
- **Maintain social connections.** During this time of unnatural isolation, connecting with others is important to share thoughts and feelings to combat loneliness and depression (Melnyk, n.d.; Pope-Ruark, 2020; Thompson, 2020). Reach out to family, friends, and colleagues who are isolated to inquire how they are doing. Invite persons to virtual coffee hours or arrange for phone chats. Try sending a simple text message or sharing a humorous meme to let others know you care.
- **Strive for balance.** The mythical work-life balance has never been more of a challenge. Pope-Ruark (2020) encourages faculty to prioritize life over work, not to feel guilty for decreased productivity, and to show yourself some compassion every day. “What can you choose not to feel guilty about?” Remember “life and health matter more than word count right now” (Pope-Ruark, 2020). Set clear boundaries around work time when working remotely. Create a consistent morning routine to start your workday and an evening ritual to signal the end of work (Pope-Ruark, 2020). Limit your consumption of work messages to scheduled time blocks and be sure to plan leisure activities that you enjoy (Pope-Ruark, 2020; Thompson, 2020). Try a new recipe or tackle a DIY home project.

- **Infection prevention.** Keep doing the basics to protect yourself and your family. Maintain social distance of at least 6 feet from persons outside of your home. Wear a mask that completely covers your nose and mouth. Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly for 20 seconds after you have been in a public place, before preparing food or eating, before touching your face, and after touching your mask or petting animals (CDC, 2020b). Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow if you cough or sneeze, then immediately wash your hands. If you cannot wash with soap and water, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol (CDC, 2020b). Disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily such as faucets, door handles, light switches, keyboards, cell phones, and countertops (CDC, 2020b). Use a product from the list of [disinfectants](#) known to kill the virus. Finally, if you experience any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), stay home and contact your health care provider (CDC, 2020a).

In closing, take care of your mental health, stay active, maintain social connections, find some work-life balance, and use infection prevention measures. The CTL staff and I are available to assist with all of your end-of-semester needs; please call 227-2483 for an appointment or email ctl@nmu.edu. Feel free to contact me for any questions or concerns: ctlscholar@nmu.edu. Wishing you and your family a safe, healthy, and relaxing semester break!

References

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