

Message from Tom Breyer, SHCC Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner:

Greetings all you social isolators.

Staff at the Student Health and Counseling Center are still here and available to help. During these uncertain times it is critical that we take care of both our physical and mental health. We have all been barraged with handwashing videos and coffee social distancing and isolation. We are all going a bit stir crazy.

As a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, my clients have been reaching out more with feelings of anxiety and depression. Mental health is the state of psychological and emotional well-being. An invisible threat can certainly disrupt and impact our mental health. Anxiety intrudes on our lives despite our social isolation. Anxiety is defined as worry nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. The Covid 19 pandemic certainly has an uncertain outcome. Anxiety, when not controlled, can weaken our immune systems and leave us more vulnerable to viral infections. So, in addition to social distancing and good handwashing and not touching our faces, the best thing we can do to keep ourselves healthy is control our anxiety to keep it from impacting our mental health which can jeopardize our physical health.

It is recommended that we minimize our consumption of news, the constant barrage of statistics and finger-pointing, increases in cases and deaths locally, nationally and worldwide is overwhelming. Psychologists are recommending that we watch no more than an hour of news every day. Americans, as a nation, have been described as the most chronically sleep deprived people on earth. This is a good time to catch up on our rest and get sufficient sleep.

But what do we do with our waking hour time now that were not working, attending classes and socializing? This is a time to be creative. Crack out that cookbook and learn to make some new recipes, bake. Watch Bob Ross videos and discover your inner artist, it's hard not to smile listening to his happy banter as he paints and makes you believe that you may be the next Van Gogh. Crafts, calligraphy, knit learn to crochet. Music, movies - Airplane or Turner and Hootch - will make you laugh; laughter is necessary for health. Artists and theatrical companies are performing virtually. Take the time to read, something we tell ourselves that we don't have time for or listen to audible books. It's a good time to read the classics, I recommend highly East of Eden by John Steinbeck, or The

Unbroken, or All the Light You Cannot See. Anything by Brian Doyle, Mink River or Martin Martin. These books all shine a light on our interconnectedness and overcoming diversity. Walk the dog - exercise and fresh air is good for you and notice that spring is here the daffodils and crocuses in cherry and apple blossoms. Our fields, gray and olive green and drab through the winter months are now verdant bursting with an iridescent green. The air is cleaner and smells better. Play board games with family and if your social isolating alone consider online video games or video chat. We are, after all, social animals and if you feel powerless against an invisible virus you can at least kick your fathers butt in monopoly by purchasing the utilities railroads and Boardwalk and Park Place, or in Yahtzee, or playing 21. Discover the joy again of writing a real letter to a friend or loved one. We spend too little time with friends in our daily busy lives, now we have lots of time. It's a joy to receive a letter versus email. Keep a journal to share with your grandkids of how the pandemic is affecting your life. We are living history and you will share it one day with your children or grandchildren.

Oregon State University has a free online class, or if you want the credit you can register, on yoga incorporating stress reduction techniques called Punch through Pandemics. There's a podcast you can watch on the American Psychological Association website, the weekly podcasts are called "Speaking of Psychology," the most recent one: "Managing your mental health during COVID-19." People are doing virtual happy hours or video chats.

It's spring! If you have nothing else to do, sort through the boxes of old pictures and label them, rearrange your furniture, give your bedroom a fresh coat of paint. Do not give in to anxiety. Remember, this will make you more susceptible to the virus by diminishing your immune system. Florence Nightingale noted over 100 years ago that fresh air, exercise, and good nutrition were the keys to good health and also noted "Every nurse ought to be careful to wash her hands very frequently during the day. If her face too, so much the better." Good advice for all. We are available at the student health and counseling center to help with telephone appointments, counseling sessions, wellness coaching, and screening/triage for those who believe they need to be seen.

Take care, we care