Stay connected to nurture your mental health

Some time in March, you might have noticed a shift in the way people refer to distancing. What we called “social distancing” at the beginning of the pandemic became “physical distancing” for many, as we realized that there’s a real need for people to connect socially, even if that means—a bit of a wrench for some—for a while—that it shouldn’t happen face to face.

Being isolated from other people can make our physical and mental health worse and can trigger anxiety and depression, but psychologist Jenni O’Donnell, PsyD, Clinical Program Director, Swedish Behavioral Health Services, says there are plenty of ways to fill the need to connect with friends and loved ones without putting ourselves or others at increased risk.

New ways to reach out and touch someone

To counteract the loss of comfort that comes from hugs and physical closeness, you can find other means to keep in touch. “A six-foot distance between us does not have to mean isolation,” Dr. O’Donnell says. “We’ve all had to shift our thinking a bit and learn new, creative ways to connect. The good news is, we humans do adapt.”

Safe ways to keep connections intact from home:

• Consider joining the video chat bandwagon—using platforms like Zoom, House Party, FaceTime and Skype—to accommodate your need to see a loved one’s face and catch up.
• If you’re already up and running on a video chat platform, have some technical skills, and know someone who’d like to communicate via video chat but doesn’t know how, offer to conduct a remote session to help them get started. (This has a two-for-one benefit: The sense of community and purpose you get by helping someone can help counter negative effects of stressful life events.)
• If video conferencing is not available or isn’t of interest to you, don’t underestimate the comfort you can find in a good, old-fashioned phone conversation with someone whose presence you enjoy.
• Start a daily group chat check-in by phone or video with your closest friends and family for updates and encouragement.
• If it works for you, rely on your existing social media platforms to chat and share news. (Be mindful though. If you’re seeing information that distresses you or you simply feel worse when you spend time on social media, limit your use to short, infrequent check-ins or take an indefinite break and find another way to connect.)
• Reach out to other people who may be feeling lonely, particularly the elderly, as a way to feel more connected and create a sense of community.
• Contact local senior centers, home care facilities or hospitals to see if they have any “virtual volunteer” opportunities.

A phone call a day...

Dr. O’Donnell suggests scheduling a specific time in each day to speak to someone online or on the phone. This also brings the added benefit of incorporating structure into your day.

Supporing change for all, for a better world

At Swedish, we strive to hear, understand and support all who struggle to feel safe and equal. Our mission is to improve the health and well-being of each person we serve—all races, all genders, all sexual orientations—every person.

In this difficult time, when racial injustice pervades our community’s news and our emotional life, we recognize the need for radical, systemic change. We support and stand with Seattle’s Black and African American communities and will do our part to eradicate systemic racism. We hear and respect the demand for equity for people of color and we unequivocally believe that Black Lives Matter. With this in mind, we are ramping up our partnerships with, and increasing support of, community organizations that elevate equity, safety and health outcomes for people of color.

• Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
• Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County
• Byrd Barr Place
• Healthy King County Coalition
• African American Health Board

Please take a moment to read our 2019 Community Benefit Report, which outlines our effort to address the most pressing health needs for all in our community. Find the report at www.swedish.org/about/overview/mission-outreach.
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visits during a pandemic or another. I want to be sure people to COVID-19, so I think a lot of and they don’t want to risk exposure. “People don’t know what to expect, so you find yourself with unfilled hours. Dr. Vatheuer says that three months ago, he was seeing almost everyone via video and seeing just a few select patients in the clinic. “Over the last month this has really reversed, and now we’re seeing most people in-person. Sometimes we can even help patients via a telephone consultation if it’s low-complexity.”

Help with the decision

Dr. Vatheuer says his advice for most people who are reluctant to return to regular care: Call your doctor’s office. “We’re here to help you figure out the next step, the safest way,” he says. “It’s okay to help determine the risk versus benefit – you’re not out there on a limb to wait it out yourself. Even if you are a first-time patient at our clinic, our great schedulers, nurses, medical assistants and providers are well equipped to talk you through the decision and find a method of care that is most safe and appropriate, and also works for you.”

Dr. Vatheuer says that this decision will take several factors into account: your age, medical conditions, risk of waiting too long to tend to a problem, and your level of concern. “It’s a little a ‘teeter-totter,’” he says. “At some point the risk of exposure to COVID-19 will be less than the risk of letting an existing medical condition escalate to become a bigger problem, and then an emergency.”

Face-to-face visits

Dr. Vatheuer outlines three basic categories his team considers. Patients falling into one of these categories should consider a face-to-face visit:

• People with symptoms or problems that could be serious, such as chest pain, new headaches or infection.
• People with chronic medical problems, especially if they are not well-controlled, such as diabetes, COPD or heart failure.
• People who need general preventive or diagnostic care. This category is further divided into older versus younger people, with younger people generally being at lower risk to come in, but older people also benefitting – especially if they are overdue for important preventive care such as cancer screening.)

To help keep you safe in Swedish clinics, here’s what we’re doing:

• Screening. Every patient ahead of time—twice. Any hint of COVID-19 symptoms and that patient goes to another pre-delineated exam station.
• Masking. All clinic staff, providers and patients wear masks. All staff washers or gels hands constantly.
• Distancing. We’re taking steps to ensure appropriate distance.

When we get


Stay connected to nurture your mental health (continued from page 1)

Need help? We’re here

Feeling overwhelmed? You’re not alone. Dr. O’Donnell says that she doesn’t know anyone – herself included – who isn’t feeling the stress of the pandemic at some level. Don’t hesitate to reach out to a mental health professional at Swedish Behavioral Health & Wellness or elsewhere, even if you schedule just one or two sessions. You have to take care of yourself, so you can take care of the other important people in your life.

Jennifer O’Donnell, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist and clinical program director for Behavioral Health Integration at Swedish. Behavioral Health Integration is an effort to serve the ever-growing recognition that our physical health is not separate from our emotional health. By treating both simultaneously, healthy and unhealthy behaviors can be viewed as part of the same medical condition. Clinical guidelines and evidence-based methods help to reduce the stigma and barriers associated with seeking mental health support. Dr. O’Donnell hopes that behavioral health becomes a routine part of how we engage with healthcare, as well as ensuring that there is no wrong way to accessing the help that someone needs.

You can use the “4 Ms for Mental Health” exercise to get an idea what kind of self-care will work for you, and use what you discover as you plan your days – both during the pandemic and after the crisis passes.

1. Movement/mobility: Exercise is great for decreasing anxiety and depression and improving sleep. Set a goal to exercise every day for at least 15 minutes. The type of movement will be different for different people, and may vary for you from day to day. Bonus points if you can get some activity outside on a sunny day. It’s nature’s best mood booster!

2. Mindfulness: When we get anxious and worried, we’re thinking of ‘what ifs’ and projecting into the future. To ground yourself in the present, stop what you’re doing and focus on your breath for five minutes. Mindfulness brings our attention back to the here and now and helps us shift our focus to things we can change, instead of those that are out of our control. (If you’re just starting a mindfulness practice, consider trying an online app like Headspace or Calm.)

3. Mastery: You know how good it feels to start and finish something, so you can check it off the list? You don’t have to be a ‘master’ of anything to create mastery. In this context, the idea is to find something you enjoy and can do safely while physical distancing – it could be cooking, writing, gardening, crossword puzzles, playing music, organizing your home, whatever you like! – and make a plan to do it. Finishing something – even if it’s just a puzzle or a routine task – can give you a sense of control and reduce feelings of helplessness or powerlessness.

4. Meaningful connections: People need people, and it’s important to keep your relationships going – especially in times of physical isolation. Don’t wait for someone to contact you. Every day, be sure to connect with other humans on any level, whether that’s a phone or text exchange, email conversations, a chat (from a proper distance) at the grocery store. If you do use video platforms, consider turning the video on so you can see each other’s faces. (Bonus points for making it fun by scheduling a virtual coffee break, happy hour, book club meeting, or whatever format suits you best.)
When COVID-19 hit Seattle, healthcare providers had to act quickly to find safe ways to tend to their patients’ health. In-person visits were limited significantly before COVID-19, telehealth (also known as virtual care) was already gradually earning its place as a convenient and effective care option. Suddenly, it took center stage.

In my entire career as a physician, this has been the most transformational, largest, fastest change I’ve experienced in healthcare,” says interventional cardiologist Sameer Gafoor, M.D., co-director of the Structural Heart and Valve Disease Program at Swedish.

“Bringing telehealth into the mainstream so quickly is an excellent example of how our Swedish leaders, community, state and country came together in a time of crisis to work through obstacles to delivering care.”

Dr. Gafoor says the unprecedented circumstances led to a level of acceptance and openness — on both the care provider and patient sides — that was conducive to change. He hopes this opportunity may inspire a permanent shift in the way medical care is delivered as we aim to offer the care provider and patient sides acceptance and openness — on both sides, it is a valuable complement. Going forward, given all the options, some people will prefer in-person visits, some will prefer virtual visits, and some will opt for a mixture of both.”

The nuts and bolts
As a Swedish patient, it’s easy, safe and secure to talk to your primary or specialty healthcare provider from your home using video technology on your smartphone, tablet or computer.

• A telehealth visit allows you and your provider to connect via your electronic device or phone without going to a clinic or hospital for an appointment.
• During your consultation, your provider can talk to you about your health concerns, work on a care plan, and if needed, provide a prescription order while you remain safe in your home.
• A telehealth visit is the same co-pay cost as your standard visit.
• Phone visits are also available for some types of appointments.

“A note about security: Swedish has a dedicated, secure portal for patient visits through a technology platform called Zoom. Enhanced security measures include encryption, meeting IDs and visit “verification” to secure your telehealth visit is private and secure. Provider visits are assigned unique passwords and online “waiting rooms.” This ensures that only your provider and you will be admitted to your visit. Our Information Security team regularly monitors Zoom for any security concerns that may arise.

Swedish has always been committed to our patients’ and caregivers’ safety, especially during a surgery or procedure. To minimize your exposure to COVID-19, we have implemented safety protocols that cover all aspects of your stay with us. Among the precautions:

• Patient testing and screening: We are testing all elective surgical/procedural patients for COVID-19 prior to their surgery/procedure. If a patient tests positive or has symptoms, we will reschedule their surgery.
• Patient isolation: If a patient has symptoms or tests positive, we isolate them safely from other patients.
• Personal protective equipment (PPE): Our facilities have adopted policies that align with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including requiring care providers wear surgical masks.
• Facility protection: Every person entering our facilities is screened at the door for fever, a major symptom of COVID-19. All visitors are given masks.
• Facility sanitizer and cleaning: We have installed hand sanitizer stations for patient use in every area of the hospital. We have also increased facility cleaning of high-touch surfaces.
• Distancing: We do not allow non-essential personnel in the facility to decrease the likelihood of exposure.

In addition, a task force of Swedish physician leaders, chief executives and infection prevention specialists meets regularly to examine all safety and infection prevention strategies. Also, a clinical focus group reviews safety procedures during the perioperative period, from admission through recovery.

To learn about the safety precautions we’re taking in our outpatient clinics, read “Where’s the last time you saw your doctor?” on page 2.

We’re open, and you have options
Even without COVID-19 in the picture, it’s not always easy to decide when — or where — to get care. Keep this guide handy for the next time you or a family member need some medical intervention.

Is your condition potentially life threatening? Call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department.
• Difficulty breathing
• Heart attack or chest pain
• Head trauma and seizures
• Stroke symptoms
• Severe bleeding
• Losing consciousness
• Fever in a child less than age two months (000 or 4 higher)

Do you need same-day care for a minor medical emergency? Make an urgent care appointment with an ARNP.
• Sprains and minor cuts

Swedish has dedicated Acute Respiratory Clinics available to see patients with moderate-to-severe respiratory symptoms for evaluation and testing. Please call your primary care provider to schedule a referral appointment.

Do you have COVID-19 symptoms? Get tested at a dedicated Acute Respiratory Clinic.

Swedish and are in need of additional screening, please call ahead to a location at the website listed below to schedule an appointment. If you’re not sure you require a test, complete our virtual assessment tool. Please note: These locations do not accept walk-ins.

Go to swedish.org to learn more.

Need evaluation for a condition that isn’t an emergency?
Schedule an in-person or virtual appointment with your primary care provider.
**Trying to do it all, and do it all well?**

**Now’s the time to re-prioritize.**

R emember the days before the pandemic, when so many people said they were struggling to balance work, kids or other family obligations, household maintenance, and all of life’s other moving pieces? Finding balance was hard enough then, but COVID-19, the surging news of continued racial injustices and spiraling political unrest brought a whole new set of emotional and practical challenges. If you’re like most people, you’ve had to set new expectations about what your life looks like and make continuous choices about how you want to use your limited time and energy. You might feel like you’re coming up short.

Fortunately, with a little coaching and support, and a few new tools in our mental health toolbox, it’s possible to find a new sort of balance and pleasure in life— even in times of uncertainty.

**Don’t expect your best performance.**

Psychologist Hayley Quinn, PsyD, behavioral health consultant at Swedish Medical Group, says she finds that nearly everyone is experiencing some kind of distress right now. “Parents are overwhelmed, now more than ever. Many older and single people are feeling socially isolated.”

Basically, any concern a person had before the pandemic is now highlighted and brought to the surface. COVID-19 brought out and intensified what was there before,” she says.

Dr. Quinn urges her patients to give themselves some grace and understand that it’s not realistic to think they can fit their regular lifestyle into this new “box” we’re in.

“A lot of people—especially working parents—are troubled because they’re used to having a rhythm to each day,” she says. “They’re now being full-time everything: worker, parent, partner, home-school teacher, cook, housekeeper. It’s overwhelming, and it’s not realistic to expect your best performance in all the areas.”

**Prioritize what feels best.**

Dr. Quinn, a parent herself, says the key to finding balance during tough times is to prioritize and give yourself permission to let some things slide. “Once you accept that you’re not going to be able to be your ‘best self’ right now, decide what you are going to be,” Dr. Quinn says. “This requires a shift in identity. What kind of parent do you want to be right now? What kind of worker? What responsibilities can you let go for now?”

She shares her own approach: “I take a walk with the kids in the morning every day, and then we have breakfast. I know other points in the day won’t be certain, once work starts up, but this gives our family a small routine to count on and some structure. A fully structured day, every day, just isn’t possible right now.”

This works in other roles too— at work, with your partner, with household duties. “Find and focus on what makes you feel the best about that role. Try to keep those top priorities, and let the rest go.”

Interested in getting in touch with Swedish Behavioral Health? Contact your regular Swedish healthcare provider.

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**CenteringPregnancy®: A New Approach to Prenatal Care**

S wededish offers a unique approach to prenatal care through CenteringPregnancy®

CenteringPregnancy® brings expecting mothers and dads/partners with low-risk pregnancies together for group sessions on all aspects of prenatal care. Lead by a certified nurse-midwife, soon-to-be parents find companionship, build community, and support each other as they discuss common pregnancy concerns and plan for their newborns.

**About the Sessions**

While traditional childbirth education classes don’t start until about two months before the baby’s due date, CenteringPregnancy® sessions, composed of about eight to 12 families, start early in the pregnancy. The 90-minute meetings are initially held every four weeks and increase to every two weeks as the pregnancy progresses. Expecting mothers and dads/partners receive 10 times the additional time with a midwife in CenteringPregnancy® program than with traditional appointments.

Expecting mothers and dads/partners can attend 10 additional time with a midwife in CenteringPregnancy® program than with traditional appointments. Women learn how to understand their own weights (and blood pressure), and at each session they discuss and learn about important subjects such as nutrition and exercise, coping with labor, breast-feeding and infant care.

**Benefits of Group Care**

The CenteringPregnancy® program is a proven model of effective care. Studies show that group prenatal care reduces premature births, increases breast-feeding and enhances psychosocial outcomes. This can be attributed to the combination of education, support and knowledge that participants gain in a group atmosphere.

There is no cost beyond that of regular prenatal care, and it is covered by insurance in the same way as other prenatal care.

For more information on CenteringPregnancy®, call 1-800-781-4080 for Ballard and 425-313-4141 for Issaquah or visit www.swedish.org/services/centeringpregnancy.