

From Surviving to Thriving through COVID-19

By: *Dr. Monica Vermani, C. Psych.*

We're all impacted by the Coronavirus epidemic. For many, in the beginning, life slowed to a near stand-still. In the months that followed, we moved through isolation and a prudent and tentative return to normalcy, while bracing for a possible second wave. During this unprecedented uncertain time, we can incorporate supportive and life-affirming strategies that will carry us through and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

With COVID-19 many of us find ourselves more stressed, fatigued, and confused than ever before. We're feeling a loss of control. People are isolated, angry, worried, wracked with self-doubt, feeling overwhelmed by dark thoughts, moods, and anxieties. We may also be feeling the effects physically, with symptoms like muscle tension, exhaustion, headaches, heart palpitations, panic attacks, irritability, moodiness, and restlessness. COVID-19 has been a time of extremes. For some it has brought deeper bonding with family; for others it has intensified conflicts. Many have suffered temporary or permanent job loss due to the pandemic, while others have settled into new, positive work routines, like the elimination of long commute times while working from home. Many working from home find themselves over working and feeling isolated without team supports and comradery. Some have made this a time to focus on healthier pursuits, others have fallen in to unhealthy patterns of substance use, or abuse.

For most of us, in one way or another, these times have been and continue to be deeply unsettling and traumatic. It is safe to say that we're all suffering to some degree. Let's take a moment to pause, and explore how we can not only survive but thrive during this very challenging time.

Paying Attention To Your Thoughts

During this unprecedented time, we need to stay connected to our thoughts and feelings. Rather than numbing with substances, or distractions with negative financial consequences, like on-line gambling or shopping, allow yourself to process what you are going through and how it is impacting you. Explore what may be bubbling up from your past.

What you focus on, expands. It is easy to become stuck in anxious loops and worst-case scenarios. Make the effort to reframe hopeless, negative thoughts to positive, grateful, hopeful thoughts. Yes, there are challenges out there, but there is also beauty and goodness. Surround yourself with positive people. Think positive, empowering thoughts. Remember that life doesn't give us more than we can handle.

Derailing Maladaptive Habits And Patterns

We all have them! But whatever your go-to negative habits and routines... like comfort eating, procrastination, denial, using substances, overuse of distractions like video games, porn, gambling, online shopping, to name a few, bring forth safety plans and practices to overcome challenges that keep you stuck in unhealthy patterns. Avoid procrastination with the 15-minute rule. Putting off a dreaded task is something we all do. Whether it's exercising, working on something you're not confident you can do, or something you dislike, the only cure for procrastination is doing the very thing you have been avoiding. So just do it... and no matter what the task, encourage yourself to stick with a task for 15 minutes before giving up. Have faith in your skillset, and you'll soon realize that when it comes to procrastination, the only way through it is to do it.

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Proactively Managing Stress

Engage mind/body practices, with apps like Insight Timer, Headspace and Calm. Use workbooks, such as Mind Over Mood to manage anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. Enforce and promote a calm state of mind with breathing exercises. Meditate, listen to mindfulness podcasts, videos, positive affirmations, mantras. Complete a daily gratitude log.

At the end of every day make note of:

- what you are grateful for
- the things that brought you joy
- what you love about yourself

Using Your Time Wisely

The outside world — even while you're staying at home more than ever — can at times seem designed to distract you at every turn. It's important to minimize distractions, like social media, gossip, negative chatter, self-soothing habits like online shopping.

Tune out time-wasting distractions and tune in to yourself — your interests, your needs, your passions and your connection to yourself. Make every hour count. Pay attention to how you spend your time, and soon it will be a habit that pays you back and enriches your life every day.

Managing Your Physical And Mental Health

Be proactive. Seek attention if you're experiencing symptoms. Use Telehealth to talk to a healthcare professional. There are also many mental healthcare resources and tools at your disposal, including distress lines and support centres.

There are also many secure online video chat platforms to facilitate counseling services with professionals specializing in stress, anxiety, mood, and suicide/crisis management. If you're in need, take initiatives to seek therapy. If you are experiencing symptoms of mood, anxiety, or stress, call a crisis line, distress centre. Seek out stress management resources and supports. Call friends and family. Create healthy support groups and buddy systems. Manage your health, sleep and hygiene. Use a lightbox if you experience seasonal depression/low mood symptoms.

Imagining Your Highest And Best

The future is imagination, and you can imagine whatever you hope to manifest for yourself. There is no limit as to how beautiful your life can become. As we pass through this time, rather than imagining worst-case scenarios, envision what you want to bring forth in your life. Create a vision board. Plant the seeds for what you hope to bring forth into your life. Imagine you at your highest and best.

In psychology, we say that for any habit to change we must reinforce the new healthy habit for at least 21 days. At this point in time, as the world is re-setting patterns and redefining health standards, You can also re-invent and reset. Introduce healthy habits and learn to grow, and re-enforce these new habits for 21 days. Shed the unhealthy patterns that no longer serve you.

This is a perfect time to shift and change. Just like everyone else, and the world itself, you are at once perfect and a work in progress. In this time of chaos and uncertainty, take care of yourself, and take the time to create positive changes in your life that will ensure that you will not only survive but thrive through and beyond COVID-19.



WELCOME TO BELL WELLNESS!



About Dr. Monica Vermani, C. Psych.

Dr. Monica Vermani, C. Psych., is a clinical psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress, mood and anxiety disorders in her private practice, www.mvpsychology.com.

*She is a well-known speaker and author, Her upcoming book, *A Deeper Wellness*, is scheduled for release in 2021.*

Dr. Vermani is the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness at www.drvermaniwellness.com.

*For 25 years she has worked with organizations and individuals, providing psychotherapy and a multi-faceted range of treatment options, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness Meditation (MBSR/MBCT), Breath-Body-Mind Techniques and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). Dr. Vermani brings depth of experience and understanding of the unique needs and challenges of individuals, couples, families and first responders to FESTI's Wellness Wednesdays. She specializes in treating trauma, stress, mood and anxiety disorders. She has published research journal articles and manuscripts in the areas of trauma and abuse, forensic psychology, and mood and anxiety disorders. Her upcoming book, *A Deeper Wellness*, will be published in the Fall of 2020. She holds a Doctorate in Clinical and Counselling Psychology and is a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.*

Please book Your Private Consultation/Session with Dr. Vermani Today!

To schedule a private online consultation with Dr. Vermani, please call and leave a confidential message at: (416) 639-6760, or email: drvermani@mvstartliving.com