



## **Well@Work Podcast Season 2, Episode 2: How to Fight COVID Related Fatigue**

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is brought to you by a grant from ASMHSA. On this episode, Dr. Ginny Sprang discusses COVID fatigue and gives some tips to fight back. And now, Dr. Ginny Sprang.

Hi, I'm Ginny Sprang and welcome to this edition of Well@Work. When the pandemic began, there was a sense of urgency around precautionary guidelines. Hand sanitizer flew off the shelves, people found their preferred style of mask, and social gatherings moved to zoom. With the innovation and rollout of vaccines, many expected mask wearing, social distancing, and travel bans to quickly become distant memories. But ongoing surges, over crowded hospitals, and the threat of new variants have shown us something very different. It felt like there was an element of betrayal for many who were adamant about following CDC guidelines and celebrated when they could finally relax somewhat for a few weeks or months, only to be told to go back to old precautions. Like any stressor, facing COVID triggers a fight or flight response. But what goes unnamed in that terminology are two other options, to freeze which is to become paralyzed by a threat or to fawn which is to give in to the threat. Understandably, people are tired, frustrated, and many feel the constant stress has become unmanageable.

Described as COVID fatigue, the sense of being overwhelmed and exhausted is increasingly common, even for those who aren't on the front lines, like healthcare workers, leading to freezing and fawning becoming more prevalent responses. Although most people have coping skills to deal with stressors and the aftermath, the extended duration of the pandemic is an unprecedented situation. The drive that mobilized adherence to protocols has all but disappeared for those who believe their efforts have been in vain, even when they're as important as ever. But there are options that, while they won't erase the stress and uncertainty that come with a pandemic, they can really help bolster the drive to continue to fight and can relieve some of the strain of COVID fatigue.

Consider Ian, he's an ER nurse with 10 years of experience. He considers himself experienced in dealing with crisis trauma and uncertainty, however with the onset of the pandemic he's had to work additional shifts, see people turned away due to the lack of available beds, and deal with people who realized far too late that the vaccine was protective, and they, and he worries about his own exposure to COVID and putting his own family at risk. Frustrated, overwhelmed, and overworked, he states that keeping up this pretense is pointless, and he constantly dreams about quitting his job. He believes his life has been overshadowed by the pandemic without a light at the end of the tunnel.

While it's naive to claim that COVID fatigue is preventable or avoidable, there are measures that you can take to restore some of the energy you may have felt early on. Here's some tips.

Number one: exercise. There are a myriad of coping skills that are proven to reduce the impact of stress and one of the most proven is exercise. In addition to the mood boosting effects of endorphin release, exercise can help reduce some of the frantic energy around the uncertainty of the pandemic and its future. If visiting a gym feels unsafe, taking a walk or jog either alone or with family allows for a break from the sense of being trapped at home, involves exposure to the calming effects of nature, and may include social opportunities with others at a safe distance.

Tip number two: slow your mind down and focus on the present. YouTube is a great resource that can help introduce and guide beginners, and even the more experienced, in mindfulness and meditation practices which are effective sources of stress relief. When everything around you feels overwhelming, mindfulness can help center you by focusing only on the present moment, the natural world around you, and just the rhythm of your own breathing.

Tip number three: process your experiences with trusted others. While walking or exercising with a friend, talk about your exhaustion, your feelings about the pandemic, holding on to these thoughts and feelings keeps them alive and it can be draining. Therapy is also an option with many therapists seeing patients over Zoom these days. Having a designated time to discuss your emotions and being able to share the burden of any worries and struggles with a professional can help you cope better with the daily stress and uncertainties surrounding COVID. Talking about your experiences can allow you to move on from it and can it leave you feeling lighter and more refreshed.

Tip number four: monitor and restrict your exposure to negative news stories. While it's tempting to keep your smartphone constantly on hand to be apprised of the news regarding COVID, being inundated with information can often be a factor that exacerbates COVID fatigue. Ignoring the pandemic isn't an option. However, you can choose to limit your reading to only a few breaking news items a day or to check the CDC or your local public health website for updates. Social media can facilitate connection to others and provide updates on news stories, but it can also feel fatiguing and isolating and be a source of untruths about the pandemic and vaccination. Many communities have spread misinformation that has led to the worsening of COVID. Relying on trusted news outlets is always a safer option. Take time out from social media and see if that decreases some of your fatigue.

Tip number five: work on your sleep hygiene. Getting adequate rest will help you feel up to managing the stressors of the day and will allow you the energy to exercise, engage, and experience the good parts of your life. For more information about getting good sleep, check out our podcast on the topic at the link provided in this description. And remember stay Well@Work.



Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast. Follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work, home, and school.