

ISSUE

# 13

February 2021



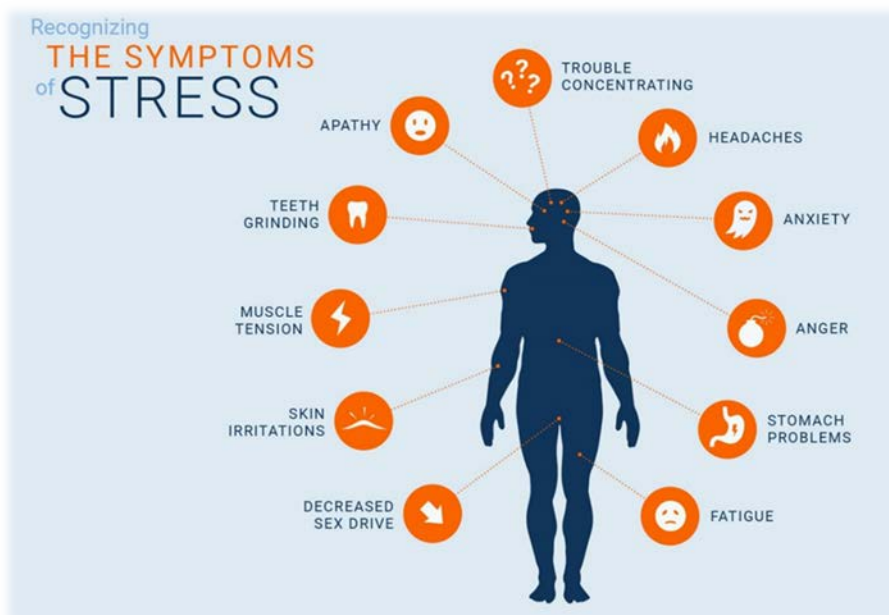
## Building Resilience – In the Workplace and Beyond

It's been almost a year now since "Covid-19" became a household name. Almost a year of physical distancing, masked faces and zoom chats. Almost a year of being "in this together" and "flattening the curve". It's no wonder most of us are feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, and many of us are on the brink of burnout. From our family relationships to our social relationships, our physical health to our mental health, Covid has impacted all areas of our daily lives. Our professional lives are no exception. Whether we're an essential worker or working from home, a frontline worker or a worker who has been laid off or furloughed, our workplace wellbeing is impacted – and not for the better.

Yet, here we are in the thick of it, and the only way out is through. Wondering if you have what it takes? Good news – you do! People often think of **resilience** as a trait rather than a skill; you either have it or you don't. But resilience is actually like a muscle. With a bit of work and repetition you can build it. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress". If you think of resilience as a bank account, where positive experiences are like deposits and negative experiences are withdrawals, it really comes down to staying in the black.

So let's start by talking about **stress**. The first step to dealing with it is to recognize it. The Mental Health Foundation defines stress as "the degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as a result of pressures that are unmanageable". Stress can cause any or all of the following symptoms, and will affect each of us slightly differently – trouble concentrating, headaches, anxiety, anger, stomach problems, fatigue, lower sex drive, skin irritations, muscle tension, teeth grinding, apathy.

*Continued on next page*



Office Locations:

625C 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Campbell River, BC

Phone 250-287-2266

Toll free 1-866-789-2266

[www.uics.ca](http://www.uics.ca)

## Building Resilience – In the Workplace and Beyond (cont'd)

Any of this sounding familiar? It's important to stay vigilant and recognize when these symptoms are becoming pervasive. Think of these symptoms as a cue. What they are really telling us is that it's time to make some deposits in the resilience bank account.

Part of building resilience includes learning from experiences and developing new coping strategies. Life in the era of Covid is unprecedented for most of us, so we're making it up as we go. That said, research on building resilience offers us lots of tried and true options to get us through tough times. These strategies will certainly help fight burnout in the workplace, and ultimately will have a positive effect in all areas of daily life. Here are a few strategies for building resilience:

### ***Communicate about job stress – look for solutions***

It's true, there are a lot of things that are beyond our control when it comes to Covid, and this can add to our stress levels. But sharing with colleagues who can likely relate can be comforting. And guess what? Some of the sources of stress might have solutions! Especially right now, it's important to problem-solve so that the things we *can* control are taken care of – this will help to reduce both stress and anxiety.

### ***Keep as many things the same as pre-pandemic life as possible***

Keeping pre-pandemic routines in place, when possible, will help to ground us and allow us to navigate the changes we can't control more confidently. Examples of things we may keep the same include; A regular sleep schedule; a regular work schedule with breaks; check-ins with supportive colleagues each day; spending time outdoors; doing things you enjoy outside of working hours.

### ***Build coping skills***

Many of the coping skills that are useful for reducing and preventing anxiety, are going to offer an invaluable boost to our resilience tool kits. Skills such as mindfulness, deep breathing, and regular exercise (each well documented to regulate our nervous systems and reduce anxiety), can be incorporated into our daily lives to help cope with stress. We need not dedicate a huge amount of time to practicing these skills to see a huge benefit. Tip: Try "Mindfulness Minutes" – once or several times daily. Some smart watches even have this built in to remind us! Give yourself one minute to stop what you're doing and bring attention to your breath; if the mind wanders keep bringing your focus back to your breath and be fully present in the moment.

### ***Practice self-compassion***

During times of high stress it's especially important to give ourselves permission to be imperfect, to lighten the load and our expectations of ourselves. Dr. Kristin Neff says, "With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give to a good friend." So, have that cup of coffee. Enjoy a breath of fresh air. Say no to the extra demands. It is important to be good to ourselves too.

These are unprecedented times that won't last forever. We all have the capacity to be more resilient – even implementing one small change each day can tip the scales in our favour. "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves" (Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*). Focus on simple and subtle shifts – communicate more, breath more, exercise more, and reduce expectations. And remember, when we can no longer control our circumstances, we can always control our attitude and perspective. This too shall pass.

*"Resilience is based on compassion for ourselves as well as compassion for others."*

**— Sharon Salzberg**



## COVID Resiliency: Self-care Starts at Home

As the world moves into its second year of COVID-19 there are a range of impacts on mental and physical health. For some, the experience of “COVID fatigue” has set in, with exhaustion and burn-out stemming from long-term stress, change and uncertainty. For others, the experience may be more akin to extended anxiety or depression.

It is also possible that some of us are normalizing the accumulated stress the pandemic has placed – and continues to place – on us. This is a potentially dangerous phenomenon because it involves minimization and dismissal of the mental, emotional and physical toll of ongoing stress. For these reasons, it is a good time for a reminder of the value of continued healthy coping and self-care strategies toward resiliency.

For many people, their home is the foundation of their lives, so this is an important place to begin thinking about and practicing self-care. That being said, each person’s home life can be significantly different. Some people live alone, some are single parents, some need to work in the public, others need to work in camp, and still others are currently unemployed. Each of these circumstances create different opportunities and barriers to self-care. Regardless of the individual situation, it remains important to keep self-care at the forefront of awareness and practice.

Here are four ideas to help take care of yourself and stay resilient to the ongoing pandemic.

### ***Think of it as “Recharging”***

A simple analogy for our self-care needs is to think of ourselves as rechargeable batteries. As with batteries we spend energy throughout the day. We do this when we go to work, when we run errands, when we do household chores and when we interact with the people in our lives. We also spend energy when we worry about the future, when we grieve losses, and countless other mental and emotional impacts that we can experience from day to day. Much of this is unavoidable, and so we need to remember to recharge. If we are able to make even a small amount of time for self-care, this can make a big difference to our long-term resiliency.

### ***Make Self-care a Scheduled Priority***

Unfortunately, when life gets extra busy taking time for ourselves is one of the first things to get shelved. Ironically, stressful times are when we need self-care the most. When we think about self-care it helps to consider it like an appointment with a medical specialist. Typically, we go out of our way to fit these appointments in because we consider them highly important – it’s our health after all! Well, self-care is about health too - it is a preventative approach that can help us avoid needing medical specialists in the first place. Therefore, it can be useful to schedule self-care into your calendar as a high-priority appointment that cannot be easily rebooked or cancelled.

*Continued on next page*

## Online Resources



For additional resources:

<https://theworkingmind.ca/COVID19-twm>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-supports-covid-19>

<https://ca.ctrinstitute.com/mental-health-and-resilience-during-covid-19/>

Building Family Resilience  
<https://youtu.be/GMkEmPrVE0>

<https://www.wlu.ca/news/spotlights/2020/may/three-tips-for-building-childrens-resilience-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>

<https://smho-smso.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tip-Sheet-Personal-Resiliency-During-Covid19-ENG.pdf>

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/mental-health-covid-19>

## COVID Resiliency: Self-care Starts at Home (cont'd)

### **No “One Size Fits All”**

We are all unique so we recharge in different ways, and different approaches to self-care are required at different times. For instance, one day you may find that rest is needed to recharge, and another day it may be exercise. One person may be drawn to creative endeavours, while another may be drawn to spending time in nature. Sometimes connecting with friends and family is called for, other times it is being alone. Regardless, the point here is that there are many ways to recharge and we can choose the method that feels right for us at the time.

### **Keep It Simple and Realistic**

Lastly, it is also a good idea to keep our self-care goals based in reality. Sometimes lofty goals can actually become barriers to self-care. For instance, if the goal of running 10km every night is unrealistic, then setting this goal is a set up for failure. On the other hand, setting a slightly less lofty goal – say, walking 5km three nights a week – may seem less impressive, but if it actually happens then it is a much better goal. This principle applies to all forms of self-care. We need to keep in mind what is realistic for us in terms of our time, energy, interests and motivation, then set our goals accordingly.

The ongoing pandemic has placed a great deal of stress on many of us and coping with this stress can be extremely challenging. In order to continue persevering through these difficult times, taking whatever opportunities we can to care for ourselves is very important toward bolstering our resiliency to COVID-19 and other stressors. Self-care will help us stay well ourselves, and also help us to show up and care for the important people in our lives.

