

# Tips for First Responders and Frontline Healthcare workers



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
Waterloo Wellington

Association canadienne  
pour la santé mentale  
Waterloo Wellington

We appreciate your commitment to the well-being of all of us. We also know this career commitment you have made is extremely difficult for you and your loved ones during this health crisis. Exhaustion, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and fear for your own health are very real and a normal reaction to the current COVID19 pandemic. The following tips and tools are our way of trying to provide some support to all of you during this time. We recognize that not all of these are possible, some may be impossible at certain times. It is our hope that one small tip has a positive impact on your own wellness.

Health care workers are at increased risk of Burnout, Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma in their day to day work in general. During times of crisis, the increased stress exacerbates these symptoms.

## Connect with your colleagues

- Talk about things unrelated to work, share a joke or funny story, try not to make every conversation about COVID19
- Check in with each other = offer support when you can – we may not all be exhausted at the same time
- Minimize contributing to others feelings of being overwhelmed by asking if they have time to chat or debrief and not “sliming” them with the details of your last emergent situation.
- Listen to each other – we often listen to respond...really focus on hearing what your colleague is saying, they may just need to vent and not have an issue “fixed”
- Acknowledge tough situations and celebrate small successes and accomplishments
- Take breaks. Even 2-3 minutes of mindfully having a snack and focusing on flavour instead of “scarfing down lunch” so you can support the next patient. Try to eat mindfully focusing on the food, and not what you have to do when you finish eating.
- Pick a partner for your shift, and check on each other often – are their (and your) basic needs being met?
- Remember that working harder/faster/longer does not mean you are doing your best work. You are not the only person who can respond to a situation.
- Debrief after shift – before you leave the building.

## After Work

- Consciously transition from work to home – sing to loud music in the car, change your clothes, go for a walk before you enter the house, brush it off of you (literally)
- Practice breathing and relaxation techniques.
- Eat healthy food, stay hydrated and get adequate sleep and exercise.
- Saying “no” is a healthy boundary. You cannot pour from an empty cup.
- Avoid or limit caffeine and use of alcohol.
- Engage in nourishing activities every day – something that fills your cup
- Take stock of your stressors – is there anything you can delegate?
- Start a self care collection- put a list of 5 minute ideas in a jar... pull one out when you can and make it happen
- Journal –writing down your thoughts and worries gets them out of your head and decreases ruminating about them
- Limit your trauma input after work – watching the news, medically based TV shows, too much social media

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- Find new creative outlets and activities. We often get stuck in doing the same old same old... even if it no longer works for us... build an obstacle course, family cooking time with new recipes, eat blindfolded, go through old photo albums, reread your high school yearbook, pick out an old favourite book from the shelf... one that you haven't read since your youth...read it again
- Seek support. Use your EAP-telephone sessions, online options are available. Just knowing what you need to do, and what the solutions are doesn't make them happen, and doesn't stop the repeat button from playing in your brain. Get it out, lighten your mental load, and create space for rest
- Responding to a crisis can be both rewarding and stressful. What are the rewards of the work you are doing? End your workday by leaving the building and thinking about the most rewarding event in your day- focus on that, and not everything that was difficult went wrong.

We cannot choose what happens at work, but we can choose how we respond to it. How you respond will help you stay well, and this will allow you to keep helping those who are relying on you. These are serious and unknown times, there is no quick fix. The solutions lie in your commitment to your own wellness – it's not selfish, it's necessary.

References – [www.tendacademy.ca](http://www.tendacademy.ca)