**Tips from Dr. Ioana Marcus, PhD, LPC, Gestalt Equine Psychotherapist**

While educating ourselves about the situation, it’s important to manage any stress or anxiety that may come up, as stress can contribute to lowered immune system function. The good news is there are many things we can do to lower stress and give the immune system a boost.

Below are some simple ways to ensure our bodies and minds are best prepared to fight the virus if welcome into contact with it.

* **Create a list of resources: people you can call and things that elicit positive memories and can make you feel better and can be accessible --** focus on all five of your senses and create a list of a resource that elicits good memories (e.g., food that reminds of you of comfort, essential oils that bring you joy, an upbeat song, your favorite vacation pictures, etc.)
* **Start each morning with a positive intention, a container for stillness and safety**-- whether prayer, [meditation](https://www.tarabrach.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/2020-03-16-Home-Retreat.pdf" \t "_blank), or simply gratitude.
* **Engage in meditation** — Meditation increases expressions of genes that are beneficial to the immune system. In addition, stress hormones can reduce the effectiveness of immune cells, so by reversing the stress response with [meditation](https://chopra.com/articles/the-virtues-of-meditation" \t "_blank), we support our immune function. [Gaia](https://www.gaia.com/" \t "_blank) has a 30-days free trial.
* **Breathe**— Doing some slow, belly breathing can calm the mind, which in turn strengthens the immune system. When we slow down the breath, we calm the stress response that can weaken the immune system. Try counting to 4 or 5 with each inhalation and exhalation to slow down your breathing. Breath activates the vagus nerve and calms down the nervous system.
* **Create a routine -- maintaining a routine/ schedule that provides you with a structure ensures a more positive outline. Pursue learning something new (e.g. hobbies, [online courses](https://www.freecodecamp.org/news/ivy-league-free-online-courses-a0d7ae675869/?fbclid=IwAR205nyIznxnG8KpGinoT72HINTeK_T3ver-ttFhYQwBE9nlzj6lppp4Fts" \t "_blank))**
* **Get good sleep** — Sleep has been known to boost T-cells which help us fight disease, especially viral diseases. Get at least 8 hours of natural, restful sleep.
* **Eat well** — Eating a healthy, organic, plant-based diet gives us the phytonutrients we need for healthy immune function. Vitamin C, Vitamin A, zinc and other trace elements are needed to support immune cells.
* **Get regular/ daily exercise** — Simple daily movement, such as walking, can keep your stress levels down, which in turn supports the immune system; however, if you are not feeling well, give your body the rest it needs by reducing activity. Try doing some gentle yoga at home to keep yourself moving and reduce [stress](https://chopra.com/articles/7-ways-meditation-can-help-you-reduce-and-manage-stress" \t "_blank). YMCA offers over [60 free classes online](https://ymca360.org/" \t "_blank).
* **Use social media mindfully** — It’s important to stay informed, however checking your phone every two minutes to see if there is another development in the story will only serve to put you on edge. Instead, when you get an urge to grab your device, try acknowledging the impulse and taking a deep inhale and exhale and repeating this simple mantra to restore peace and harmony: Shanti (shan tee).
* **Challenge negative or anxious thoughts by reframing them into more neutral or positives** (e.g. "this is crazy, I don't know how we are going to get through this" into "we are finding our way through a solution).
* **Connect with loved ones** — As schools shut down and people stop shaking hands, it’s important to maintain connections with those that we trust and love. Interpersonal connection has been shown to reduce stress and increase happiness. As much as possible check-in with those you love even if it’s just a video chat, call or text.

Resources:

[Tara Brach Meditations](https://www.tarabrach.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf/2020-03-16-Home-Retreat.pdf" \t "_blank)and Home retreat

[CDC Managing Stress and anxiety](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html" \t "_blank)

[Breathe for Change](https://www.breathe4change.com/" \t "_blank) for Educators and parents