

Mood Boosting Activities during a Pandemic for Patients with Chronic Pain

*This handout is intended for clinician use (not for patient distribution) to help with brainstorming ideas for additional mood boosting activities to support their patients and prevent depression during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was created by the SPP Pain SIG Clinical Committee. We hope that this is a helpful resource for our colleagues to both affirm and expand your creative toolbox for supporting patients with chronic pain during this pandemic.

- **Don't Neglect the Basics**

- Exercise
- Sleep (good quality sleep, consistent schedule, follow sleep hygiene recommendations)
- Hydration and healthy diet
- Establish a routine
 - Schedule tasks during the day – feeling accomplishment improves motivation & mood
 - Keep moving – doing activities boosts mood
 - Schedule a social contact or fun activity each day (scheduling pleasant activities boosts mood)
- Social engagement
 - *Review that social interaction is a critical component of CBT interventions for depression
 - Seeing other people will boost mood
 - Virtual social activities are great, but try to find in-person (and socially distanced!) activities, too!
 - You might be spending a *lot* of time with your family, so finding ways to connect with others outside of your home can give you some variety
- Relaxing/self-care
 - Practice mindfulness; there are several good apps that are free and offer guided imagery, mindfulness, meditations, etc. (e.g., Meditation Studio, Insight Timer, Stop, Think & Breathe [MyLife], Smiling Mind). Headspace is also a good application, but it requires a subscription. Look for opportunities to practice a “mindful minute” during times where your brain would usually go on auto-pilot (e.g., when brushing your teeth)
 - Practice relaxation exercises (e.g., deep breathing (BellyBio is a fun biofeedback app to use during breathing exercises), visualization/imagery, progressive muscle relaxation)
 - Schedule “me-time” and take a bath, read, do a relaxing activity you enjoy
- Review types of unhelpful thoughts & discover effective thought challenges that can reduce the intensity of the emotions or make the thought feel less powerful
- Keep paying attention to emotions-journal, write, create
 - Bullet journaling
 - Positive self-statements on post-its around their room/house

- Take notes from encouraging motivational speakers
 - Pacing is still important, even in a pandemic! Try to resist the urge to cram all your mood-boosting activities in on days when you're feeling good – make sure every day has some active ways to boost your mood, and some down time.
- **Get out of the House!**
 - Even if just going for a walk, get out of the house EVERY day
 - It's ok to walk in rain/snow/heat!
 - Try a mindfulness walk
 - Stop, Think, & Breathe (aka MyLife) app has a guided mindful walk
 - Listen to a new podcast or audiobook (lots of local libraries have increased their offerings of free audiobook downloads) while walking around your neighborhood
 - If you're getting bored of walking around your neighborhood, try to find small ways to mix it up (even walking on the opposite side of the street than the one you usually walk on or walk a loop in the opposite direction can give you some new things to look at!)
 - Add a nature hunt or scavenger hunt to a neighborhood walk
- **Just do it!**
 - Even if you don't feel like it, DO the planned activity
 - It can help to set a goal to do the activity for at least 5 minutes; oftentimes getting started is the hardest part
 - Say "yes" if someone invites you – join a video conferencing call with a friend, run an errand with your parent, join your family for dinner, help make dinner...
 - Doing activities, especially with other people boosts mood
- **Schedule time with friends or family or family friends**
 - Stick to your plans, even if you don't feel like it!
 - See list of social activities on "improving functioning" handout
- **Learn a new skill – YouTube has several great videos that can teach new skills and several applications can help you track progress towards goal**
 - Set a goal for yourself
 - Gives you a new/positive thing to focus on
 - Play an instrument
 - Learn a new language
 - Photography
 - Watercolor or oil painting
 - Knit or sew
 - Origami
 - Bake or Cook
 - Drawing
 - Run, bike, boat, fish, hike...
- **Find ways to Contribute**
 - Volunteering to help others will also help to boost your mood
 - Find a local food distribution center or homeless shelter to volunteer

- *Many food distribution centers need help
 - Contact your church group to ask for someone who needs help
 - Offer to do yard work or pick up groceries for an older neighbor or someone who is isolated/ high risk
 - Do virtual tutoring for a younger student – contact your local elementary school or a school in a low-income neighborhood
 - Offer to set up a “reading time” for young neighbors or friends
 - See what local animal shelters offer for volunteer services
 - Some animal shelters have programs for youth to read and/or play music to animals awaiting adoption
 - Brainstorm a Fundraiser
 - Research non-profit organizations that are important to you
 - Social justice, environmental protection, animal rights/protection, religious organizations...
 - Brainstorm a creative way to raise funds to support that organization
 - Write letters or send/make cards to older/lonely family members or neighbors
- **Music**
 - Choose music to boost your mood
 - Ask patients if matching music to their mood helps to improve their mood (makes them feel relief/catharsis) or if it makes them feel more sad/stuck
 - Matching music to mood may help to boost mood
 - Some patients prefer more upbeat/happier music to challenge and flip their mood, while
 - Create playlists of favorite or go-to songs that can be easily turned on. These playlists can be differentiated based on activity/need (i.e., soft, relaxing to aid in sleep; upbeat and motivating for exercise; comforting for low mood or anxiety, etc.)
 - Have a dance party and sing along – even if you’re alone
- **Explore the World**
 - Take virtual field trips, virtual museum tours, or view webcams of parks/wildlife around the world (Explore.org)
 - Many zoos offer live webcams of animals or have educational games/videos on their websites
 - Explore state parks and outdoor spaces that are open
 - Take a virtual walk at home – there are lots of YouTube videos available where you can “walk-along” with someone in a city you’ve never been to before (walking in place, especially good if the weather is not great or you live in a neighborhood that is not very walkable)
 - Research a time period or historical figure:
 - Create a PowerPoint project for your family

- Read historical fiction about that era, find/make recipes from the time, look at artwork from the time period
- **Take advantage of our virtual and remote world to continue previously enjoyed activity**
 - Take classes online (dance, singing, karate, drawing, etc.)
 - Find videos to help maintain your pre-COVID lifestyle (for example, yoga videos on YouTube to keep up yoga class)
 - Local library applications allow for borrowing electric books still
- **Be creative**
 - Outside movies
 - Drive thru restaurant or curbside pick up meals and picnic
 - Outside socially distanced ice cream party
- **For clinicians: Connect with the patient's systems for help**
 - What are the family's strengths and do they have ideas?
 - What friends can help?
 - Can the family or community set up an activity?
 - What is the community already doing? Is the family connected with the community and if so how can they get information about community activities (local drive in movie, virtual 5k, reading competition online through library, school competition for best dance on Instagram, etc.)
 - Are their extracurricular groups still meeting virtually? Are they connecting?
 - For example, the scouts virtual campout
 - Virtual dance or music classes
 - If you are doing telehealth then this is a great time to meet more family members and find ways they can be helpful to the patient and to support improved functioning.
- **Sources for reference:**
 - CDC Guidelines:
 - General CDC info: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
 - School related: from 6/30: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-testing.html>
 - American Academy of Pediatrics Guidelines:
 - Return to school: <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>
 - National Association of School Psychologists – COVID Resources: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>
 - World Health Organization:
 - General: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019?gclid=CjwKCAjwgdX4BRB_EiwAg8O8HVMlKYxWtkpc1qJvc2zwnIV_EJlAleJkjJdumzmWkjbQWPrwvxbayXoCm7QQAvD_BwE

- School Recs (3/2020): https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=baf81d52_4&gclid=CjwKCAjwgdX4BRB_EiwAg8O8Ha0nju5gRaT8EKuiaKSMr5XEFTmTvzlxHbyijMLrDjZE6vwdc0t7cBoC5clQAvD_BwE
- American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/>
- Check with local public health department recommendations
- **Ask your hospital/department/media department for guidelines and talking points