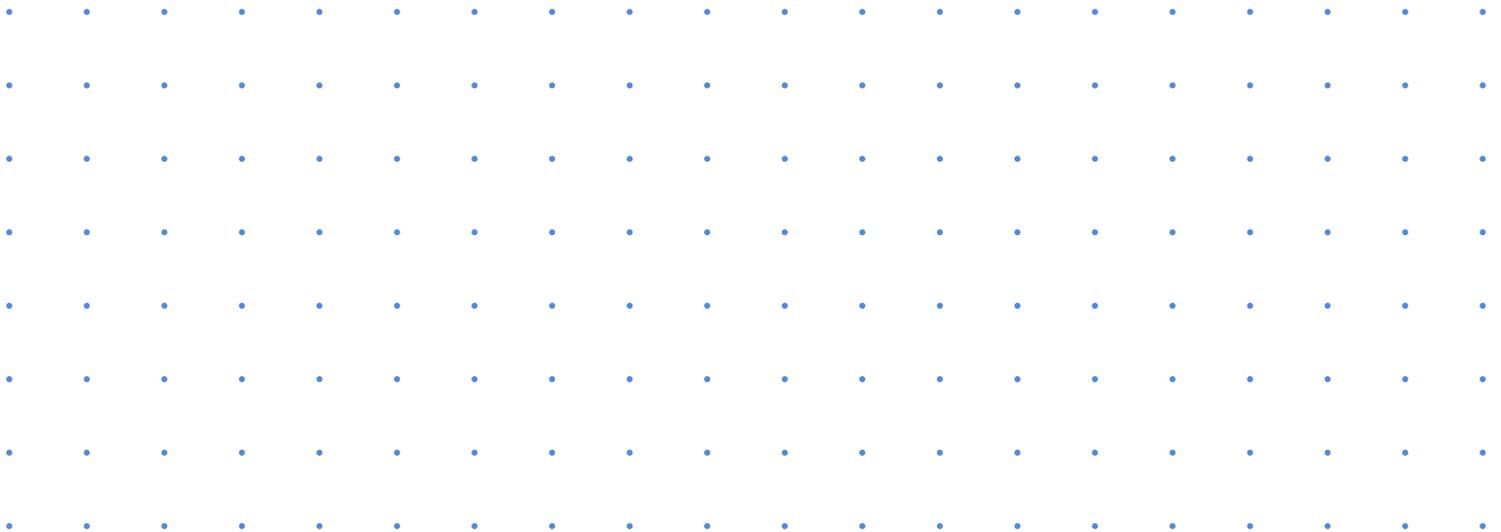**Modern Health**

Start improving today

In this series of exercises, we'll explore techniques for feeling more relaxed and positive, by working with your emotional channels.

How emotions work

All feelings have function. Think of emotions as messengers whose job is to warn you about events in your environment. If we pay attention to our emotions, we can tap into their wisdom.

We experience emotions through three "channels": 1) thoughts, 2) physical sensations, and 3) behaviors. It's common to experience an emotion in one of these channels before the others, and addressing one channel will often positively affect all three.

Here are a handful of difficult emotions. Notice how each one arises in all three channels.

EMOTION	THOUGHT	SENSATION	BEHAVIOR
Afraid	"I'm going to lose my job and run out of money."	Increased heart rate, tigntness in chest	Making panicky, irrational decisions, insomnia
Worried	"What if I get sick? What will happen to my family?"	Muscular tension in the neck and shoulders	Fidgeting, difficulty concentrating
Embarrassed	"I can't believe I did that—I'm such a fool."	Hot, flushed skin, cold sweat	Critical self-talk, spiraling thoughts
Angry	"This is so unfair. Why is this happening to me?"	Clenching jaw, increased heart rate, shallow breathing	Yelling, stewing, agression
Disgusted	"I can't take it. That is so gross."	Irritation, revulsion	Aversion or urge to flee, hand-washing or urge to be clean

Coping with strong emotions

Although it can feel like strong, difficult emotions will last forever, they never do. Emotions are like waves—they ebb and flow, and can feel more or less strong at different times. Resisting your feelings can give them power and strength, making them arise even more intensely. Here's an exercise to help you learn how to surf your emotions.

1. Notice your emotion
Do you feel the emotion in any particular part of your body?

2. Notice your behavior
What actions are you taking, consciously or unconsciously?

3. Notice your thoughts related to the emotion
Let your thoughts arise and pass. Try not to react or get attached to them.

4. Notice the intensity of the emotion
You may find that it peaks, and then slowly diminishes over time.

5. Notice that you can handle it
You've got this!

Challenging difficult thoughts

When you experience a strong negative emotion, check in with what the emotion is telling you about the situation at hand. What thoughts are you having about the situation, and what evidence do you have that these thoughts are true? Here is an exercise to help you examine and challenge your thoughts.

1. What is the situation that's challenging you?

_____

_____

_____

2. What are your emotions? How strongly do you feel them?

_____

_____

_____

3. What thoughts are you having about the situation?

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_____

_____

4. What evidence is there that these thoughts are true?

_____

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_____

**5. What evidence is there that these thoughts are false?
Is there another potential explanation?**

_____

_____

_____

**6. Is there a more balanced or realistic thought
that arises for you now?**

_____

_____

_____

**7. How strong are your emotions now?
Are you having any new emotions?**

_____

_____

_____

8. How might you behave differently now?

_____

_____

_____

Cultivate positive behaviors

Engaging in pleasurable activities can improve your mood and functioning. This is different from resisting or avoiding emotions—you can still notice emotions as they arise. Start with a simple behavior. Ask yourself, "What's something small I can do right now to start feeling better?" Try these mood-lifting activities.

1. Connect purposefully with others

During a stressful time, it can be easy to withdraw, or not be fully present with those around you. Taking time to connect with loved ones will help you feel grounded. Eat dinner as a family, go for a walk with your kids, or video chat with friends and family.

2. Get your body moving

Exercise is an amazing mood booster. If you can go outside, take a brisk walk or jog—bonus points if you can do it in a place with some greenery. If you need to stay indoors, take a few minutes to stretch. Watch a yoga video on YouTube if you need inspiration.

3. Give yourself an information buffer

Don't check the news, your work communications, or other sources of information that could cause stress first thing in the morning or right before you go to sleep. Reserve the beginning and end of your day to connect with yourself or your family.

4. Improve your environment

Engaging your senses and making your space more comfortable can help lift your mood. Try a simple change, like reducing clutter, opening the windows, lighting a candle, or playing some upbeat music.

5. Develop a morning and evening routine

Beginning and ending your day with built-in moments of self-care helps set the tone of your life. Ex: Eat a healthy breakfast, take a shower, walk your dog, write in your journal, etc.

6. Clock out

Commit to ending the work day at a reasonable time, and then transition to an activity that marks the beginning of home time.

7. Look for the positive

Crises can bring out the best in humanity. Look for what is going right in the world and how people are supporting each other.

8. Tap into gratitude

Purposefully thinking about what you are grateful for each day improves your mood and outlook. Feeling grateful for someone in your life? Telling them you appreciate them can make you both feel better.

9. Recognize what you're doing well right now

Try not to judge yourself for your thoughts or emotions. Be kind and gentle with yourself. You are coping with this stressful situation much better than you think.

10. Set emotional boundaries

Emotions can be contagious. It's okay to set boundaries around how you interact with people in your life who might "pile on" to your stress level with additional negativity.