

## PERSONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS DURING A PANDEMIC

I saw this post and wanted to share it with you. Please take a moment to read it before reviewing the rest of the document:

“And, what if...”

If we subscribe to the philosophy that life is always working out for us, that there is an intelligence far greater than humans at work...

That all is interconnected.

What if... the virus is here to help us?

To reset. To remember.

What is truly important.

Reconnecting with family and community.

Reducing travel so that the environment, the skies, the air, our lungs all get a break. Parts of China are seeing blue sky and clouds for the first time in forever with the factories being shut down.

Working from home rather than commuting to work (less pollution, more personal time).

Reconnecting with family as there is more time at home.

An invitation to turn inwards -- a deep meditation -- rather than the usual extroverted going out to self-soothe.

To reconnect with self -- “what is really important to me?”

A reset economically.

The working poor. The lack of healthcare access for over 30 million in the US. The need for paid sick leave.

How hard does one need to work to be able to live, to have a life outside of work?

And, washing our hands -- how did that become a "new" thing that we needed to remember. But, yes, we did.

The presence of Grace for all.

There is a shift underway in our society -- what if it is one that is favorable for us?

What if this virus is an ally in our evolution?

In our remembrance of what it means to be connected, humane, living a simpler life, to be less impactful/ more kind to our environment.

An offering from my heart this morning. Offered as another perspective. Another way of relating to this virus, this unfolding, this evolution.

It was time for a change, we all knew that.

And, change has arrived.

What if...

This “assignment” is completely optional, but if you find yourself looking to try to turn something negative into something positive, I encourage you to give it a go. This will serve as a way of reviewing many of the concepts we have discussed together so far and apply them to a real-life situation: voluntary quarantine. I hope you find it useful! If you want to share with me or just communicate in general, please feel free to email me: [scarey@sachem.edu](mailto:scarey@sachem.edu)

**Reflect on how your life is different now than it was two weeks ago. What has changed? How do you feel about everything that is going on? If you feel anxious, what specifically do you notice yourself feeling anxious about? If you do not already, now might be a great time to begin a journal for yourself. You are living in a time that future generations will certainly learn and read about. Give your own first-hand account!**

### ***At-Home Health and Wellness Plan***

I strongly encourage that everyone begin to create new lifestyle routines with our time at home, as we typically say that time and energy are our barriers to living a healthy lifestyle. If your parents are at home also, get them involved! There is so much happening beyond our control and that can make us feel anxious and overwhelmed. But, as we discussed, the power can be found in what we CAN do and CAN control. Try to focus there!

#### **Key Areas of Health and Wellness:**

- 1. Sleep**
- 2. Nutrition**
- 3. Movement**
- 4. Mental Health**
- 5. Social Health**

#### **SLEEP**

Teens should be getting about 8-9 hours of sleep each night. That has probably been difficult to do with school and other activities. Getting the right amount of sleep means a healthier mind and body. Create a new bedtime routine, if you haven't already. We are supposed to stop using our phones about an hour before we want to fall asleep. Talking on the phone is OK, but not stimulating activities like watching videos, texting, or social media. Watching TV is a bit different and more acceptable, as the light is different. Try to use this time to learn about yourself: what helps you to wind down that isn't electronic? Maybe try some night-time Yoga routines, or progressive muscle relaxation as we have done in class. If you aren't using alarms, awesome! But notice when your body naturally wakes up. And get out of bed when you wake up!

**NUTRITION**

This one may be difficult for many of you right now. Some of you may have a very limited supply of food and maybe some of you are left to prepare meals on your own for the first time. Do the best you can with what you have! Remember that frozen fruit and veggies can be a very cost-effective way to make sure you are getting what your body needs! It's a great time to try out some of our smoothie recipes (reach out if you'd like more!)

The internet is full of creative ways to eat healthier on a budget. If you feel like you can and want to, use some of your time to experiment in the kitchen!

**MOVEMENT**

There are many free at home workouts available online and even on YouTube. My advice is to set a goal for at least 30 minutes of scheduled exercise at least 5 days per week. Plan it out, then stick to it. Also, social distancing does not mean you can't be outside. Just 30 minutes a day of walking can have major health benefits, both mentally and physically. If you want more information or resources, reach out!

**MENTAL HEALTH**

There are so many aspects to this one and so many ways to approach each one depending on you as an individual. Still, there are some constants: our brains need to be cared for through creativity, intellectual stimulation, and emotional regulation. You need to find ways to keep your brains active during this time. Some of you need more of this - especially those more prone to anxiety or depression. But we all need mental stimulation each and every day.

Use this time to explore hobbies: what is it you actually enjoy doing and feel satisfied from?  
Use this time to explore your own interests: what is it you enjoy reading and learning about?

Use this time to check in with yourself: what do you feel? What are you really like when no one is around and there are no distractions?

**If you want to use this time home as an opportunity to do some more personal growth and development, I'd like to invite you to learn more about the 6 Sustainable Happiness skills backed by neuroscience:**

1. **Mindfulness**-Mindfulness doesn't have to be scary! Once I figured that out, I started to realize that mindfulness was something that I could use in every moment of every day. One quick way to survey mindfulness? Ask yourself: what am I currently thinking? Then pay attention, without judgment, meaning do not label thoughts and feelings as being good or bad. You might be surprised what you learn about yourself!

2. **Human connection**-There are so many ways to cultivate connection. Everywhere from taking an extra moment to understand why someone might be having a bad day, to making eye contact and smiling to strangers, physical touch, to even asking better questions. I went from “How are you?” to “What’s the best thing that’s happened to you today?” This skill may take more creativity these days amidst “social distancing”, but may be more necessary than ever before.
  
3. **Gratitude**-We’ve all heard of gratitude journals, but in my busy life, that just wasn’t practical. I started listing at least one thing I was grateful for on my drive to work. The first thing I thought of? My car! Other simple ways to cultivate gratitude? If you think something nice of someone, speak it! Text them, or let them know right in the moment you think it. Being that life has truly changed for all of us so suddenly, I find myself practicing this skill more than usual.
  
4. **Positive outlook**-Have you ever found that once you focus on something, it grows? The same thing happens with a positive outlook! Look for the good, and you will see it. Pause, and ask yourself, “What’s the BEST case scenario?” Once I began to think this way, everything changed. It didn’t mean that I was without negative external circumstances happening to me. It just meant that I could hold on through them, being present, but knowing that it was much bigger than a mere negative moment.
  
5. **Purpose**-Often, purpose can be an overwhelming idea, but it can be much smaller, much more digestible. They say purpose is the intersection of skills and passions; I used this formula, and started looking for ways to create purpose for the day ahead – nothing more. I would tell myself, for example, today’s purpose – the way I will find meaning *today, right now* – is by updating and reviewing a friend’s resume. Simple ways to give back can be a theme in your life, using your strengths and passions.
  
6. **Generosity**-Look for easy ways to help someone else in your day-to-day life. This can be as simple as smiling at a stranger, holding the door open for someone, or taking someone’s grocery cart back for them. The possibilities are endless, and can move from small day-to-day service, to larger commitments of time. Either way, notice how this makes you feel when you’re done.

*To put this into practice, make a list for yourself of what you are doing or could do to incorporate these skills into your life right now!*

**SOCIAL HEALTH**

This is definitely a tricky one right now, but we have such an amazing opportunity to strengthen our relationships by being more intentional in our interactions. Some of you may be feeling truly alone right now, especially if connections with family members have been broken. I can't begin to imagine what it must be like for those of you who are not comfortable or safe at home.

For those of you who are at home, looking to strengthen your relationships, I can offer you many interesting interviews that can get some conversation going.