



Facing a Winter with Covid

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Well, I've put away all my lawn furniture and am looking a carpet of leaves that need to be swept up; but my mind is focusing on the next few months of getting through what I hope will be the final stretch of this plague.

The summer worked, sort of. We managed to see one or two people at a time and stay socially distanced. It wasn't the usual summer fun time with pool parties and the beach, but it worked out. We managed to connect emotionally and socially, mostly without physical touch. I had a three-person birthday party for a friend poolside where it poured rain, but we still had fun and takeout food and distanced cupcakes. It was kind of unique and ok, but now...



It feels like we are being asked to get back in the box and close the lid— for awhile, in the dark and cold, and often alone. Yikes! And no real end in sight.

But wait: the vaccine. Yes, we are going to get there, and when it gets nearer we'll talk about safety and efficacy of options. It's sooner than projected; that's all good. But there is a good stretch of time before we get there.

Let me just say "good job" to most of us who have sensibly worn masks, and not gone to movies or family weddings, funerals, or births. Good job eating take-out (God bless Grub Hub). It's been a bear. But we have seen from all the super-spreader events that this virus is very contagious and some folks are getting really sick and dying from it. Take a breath and feel proud of yourself for managing a new and impossibly difficult experience with grace and kindness. You did well.

So, how do we get through winter?

First things first: Stay in one piece

Keep really good track of your state of physical and mental health, and that of your family members. Over this summer, during the “lull,” I had sinus surgery, a colonoscopy, and a skin cancer check (all went well). We must do the medical things that we need to, even with COVID. The incidence of preventable deadly heart attacks has been much higher, people are having burst appendices, and so on. Hospitals are good at managing things, and they have had a good long learning curve on how to keep non-COVID issues away from COVID ones. As my doc told me when I had surgery, “You’re in the safest place you can be except for your home; everyone here in the surgical ward is tested and safe.”

The same is true for mental health issues. If, for example, you have OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), the lack of control of the virus can be even more unmanageable for you, and you may need additional therapy or a meds consult. Maybe you’re experiencing plain old vanilla anxiety. I sometimes wake up with nightmares that I know are triggered by the virus. Stress creates a level of anxiety that functions as a baseline. This is normal in a situation that is unique and scary. What is most important is to keep an eye on what you know to be your triggers— and those of your children and parents, etc. When they occur it may be time to keep a closer eye and perhaps ask for and get some help. Telehealth can be of service, especially for issues of mental health. No, it’s not as good as being there, but practitioners are getting very good at working with people virtually and getting them through this crunch time. Do not try to tough it out. Know what your tolerance is and be mindful of not exceeding it.

All the old saws apply. Get help, stay connected, ask people to give you feedback about how they feel you’re doing during the pandemic, and keep track of your medical issues. It’s also important to remember to go to the lab and get your lab work done if that’s something that you do on an ongoing basis. This also is a pretty safe process— usually requiring people to call ahead before they come in— and can be done quickly. The information in your blood can really help if you are managing anything from low thyroid to blood levels for your medication.

Secondly: Stay connected

I know everyone is saying this, but it really is important and can’t be stressed enough. Staying connected with people who love you— voicing your concerns and hearing theirs— is a real way of minimizing the difficulty of this situation. Even if you’re not normally a person who complains about things, this is a time to complain and listen to others complain! It’s healthy to get it out. It’s also a time to share stories about the past with your kids, and just learn new things about the people that you love. It can be an opportunity. Let’s try to make it one.

Get into a COVID routine

Boy do I miss the gym. I really never thought I’d say those words. I miss my 80- year-old buddies who are next to me on the elliptical, pounding away and sweating together. I miss their silly jokes and hearing stories about their pets. I don’t think it’s a smart idea to go to the gym these days. But I’ve established a routine that includes an in-house workout: good stretching, meditation and yoga. And no, I’m not perfect at doing it all the time, but I’ve actually put it into my calendar as a scheduled activity. We are creatures of habit, and despite sometimes feeling otherwise, a little structure can help. So put in your calendar set times for exercise, meditation, even chat times with your relatives. Having the structure— aside from your work schedule— will allow you to feel more secure and not quite as ungrounded.

Short term goals

I'm going to knit four blankets. That's one of my goals for this winter. I know, I know: they're cheaper to buy. But they keep my hands busy and I can knit while I'm doing something else. It was really fun to pick out the yarn and see the little neat piles and imagine what they would look like when they were put together. Find your projects. If you're looking to manage your weight or get into an exercise routine, set "small step" goals. Setting large goals and failing at them is not going to make this thing easier. So instead of planning on losing 50 pounds and running a marathon, why not try losing ten pounds and doing 10,000 steps a day? You'll feel successful and proud of yourself and not feel discouraged, if the goals are reasonable.

Sleeping

I know I sound like a broken record about this. Sleep is the keystone to health, both mental and physical. If you're not sleeping well—which many of us are not—you're not going to be operating at full speed. I personally like wearing a sleep tracker, which is part of a health tracker and usually costs under \$150. But whether or not you want to know the data, getting a good night's sleep and waking up refreshed is essential. If you would like to look into this, I'm happy to work on sleep as a project. There are herbs that can help enormously with sleep, and patterns of behavior as well; these can be tailored to the individual. I cannot stress enough that sleep is key. Without a good night's sleep you are more vulnerable to illness—and crankier.

Reward yourself

Lord knows you deserve it, just getting this far in the pandemic and managing. Your reward can be anything from an hour of Netflix at the end of the day to twelve chocolate almonds or whatever floats your boat. It can also be taking a nice little nap on a weekend, even though there are a million tasks you should be doing. Rewarding yourself can do a lot to raise your spirits.

We will make it through this thing. The vaccine is real and it is coming. I will be researching and trying to understand safety issues and procedures for the vaccine as we get more information. But there will be a vaccine that will be effective and safe. And although I'm not a person who particularly loves vaccines, I think in this case it's going to be a much lesser of two evils for most people.

Meanwhile be kind to each other and remember to b-r-e-a-t-h-e.

Namaste,
WENDY