

# 3 Ways to Manage Your Mental Health While Living with Chronic Kidney Disease

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Web ID: 4053



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Living with kidney disease can have a major impact on your mental well-being. You already have many responsibilities like taking your medications, maintaining a good diet, and keeping up with dialysis treatments – each taking their own toll on your stress level. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues are common when living with kidney disease. Add a global pandemic into the mix, and things become even more overwhelming. While physical health is of utmost importance, it is just as important to manage mental and emotional health. Here are three simple ways you can focus on your mental well-being every day:

# 1

## Stay Connected to Loved Ones

It's no secret that this pandemic has increased feelings of isolation and strained our relationships with loved ones. For a long time, we couldn't do many of the social activities that bring us joy. People living with kidney disease are at high risk for contracting COVID-19 because they are immunocompromised, and it is even more prudent that they follow these restrictions for their health. But this has made staying connected to friends and family and meeting new people difficult, which is extremely hard on our mental health. And when our mental health is affected, it's much easier to retreat into ourselves and adapt to isolation.

Video or phone calls, texts, messages on social media—these are all great ways to stay connected to those we love without having to meet in person. And as these COVID-19 restrictions are lifting, and we slowly make our way out of this pandemic, be sure to make as much time as you can to safely see your loved ones in person.

# 2

## Unplug

On top of what you are already handling in your personal life with managing kidney disease, work, interpersonal relationships, and more, today's world is often over-stimulating with social media, television, and news always keeping our brains on and alert. It's essential to “unplug” your brain for a little bit every day to better manage stress and emotional well-being.

Put on your favorite music and take a ten minute dance break; perform deep-breathing exercises and/or meditate; stare out the window; get outside for some fresh air; talk to a friend. Find any activity that allows you to put a pause on everything else and simply unplug.

# 3

## Have a Good Laugh

Did you know laughter can provide stress relief? When you laugh, it doesn't just help you unload emotionally, but laughing allows physical changes that are proven to help physical health, as well. Laughter can stimulate circulation and aid muscle tension, reducing physical symptoms of stress. It can also stimulate other organs like your lungs and heart because it enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air and increases endorphins released by your brain. In the long term, laughter will not only improve your mood and increase personal satisfaction, but it will also help improve your immune system and relieve pain.

Insert some humor into each day, whether that's through good conversation and jokes with friends, family, and your care team or through your favorite shows, movies, and books. Laughter can be the best medicine.

Our mental and emotional health are key to our overall health, so it's important to develop practical habits of self-care and resiliency. Spending time with loved ones, unplugging, and laughter are just three ways to tend to mental health—there are a myriad of ways to cultivate habits that improve happiness and satisfaction with our lives.



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