



Musings from a Thirsty Therapist **Edition 2**

By Kristin Wilson, PT, DPT, GCS Co-owner, Action Potential

In September 2019, I published an article entitled, *Musings from a Thirsty Therapist* which explored the concept of lifestyle adaptation and the need to “buy-in” to an activity plan in order to make a permanent difference. One year later, I find it interesting to reflect on my current state of mind amidst the struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic, wondering once again how to adapt one’s lifestyle to yield a positive physical and mental change.

The past five months have brought, and continue to bring, significant disarray to my life and the lives of my friends, family, co-workers, professional colleagues, and patients. My mental well-being is being challenged on a daily basis having to balance home life, career, a restricted social calendar, home schooling and fluctuating emotions - each which bring difficulties that require significant modifications to my typical life. I am thirsting for my old lifestyle. Used to having time for myself to pursue hobbies or meet with friends, the transition to a limited routine with increased responsibilities has resulted in days that vary from overwhelming to manageable, at best. *But thriving?* I’m far from thriving, and it’s disconcerting. Perhaps you are in the same boat, paddling alongside me down the tumultuous waters of the nauseating, and seemingly uncontrollable, “new normal.”

I am forever grateful for my support system, from whom I hear stories of a similar difficulty to thrive. We are all just trying to survive. COVID-19’s arrival, much like an unwanted houseguest, unpacked its luggage in our homes and, despite our urging for a shortened visit, seems intent on staying for the unforeseeable time. My coping strategy over the past five months initially began as denial, progressed to fear, then anger, and now an unsettling complacency has found its way into my demeanor. My vulnerability in sharing this creates some comfort, as I feel I’m not alone in this mentality. However, in writing this article, I am committing to finding an alternative attitude moving forward with the understanding that it will require effort, an ample support system, and temporary episodes of failure along the way. As a lifestyle and health expert, I realize a change is necessary; for complacency and reduced mental well-being will undoubtedly result in long-term health conditions and complications. So, I insist, please join me on my crusade for a brighter outlook, starting now.

COVID-19, and its massive intrusion, offers a list of problems that feel daunting. Often times, stress and inactivity compromise us physically and, as a physical therapist, I am trained to alleviate some of those symptoms. Hopefully, one or more of the solutions brainstormed below will help you foster a sense of control that will help improve your physical and mental well-being.

WORKING FROM HOME:

- To reduce pain in your neck and back, place your monitor/laptop/device on a raised surface just below eye level, straight in front of where you are sitting. If possible, also find an alternate spot where you can stand to work occasionally.
- Set aside a feasible to-do list of tasks for each day to keep you focused amidst distractions and create a sense of accomplishment.
- Take breaks throughout the day. Your body isn’t used to this new environment and will need to change positions. A quick walk to the mailbox or around the house will allow your body to move just enough to mitigate pain.

HOMESCHOOLING/DISTANCE LEARNING:

- Ensure your kids have their own workspace complete with a table/desk/counterspace.
- Encourage your kids to move around throughout the day to burn some energy and prevent poor postural habits.
- If your kids are using a tablet, have them prop it on a raised surface to avoid neck strain.

EXERCISE/FITNESS:

- Build exercise into a daily routine. For example, if you are required to attend a weekly conference call, consider taking it while walking on the treadmill or

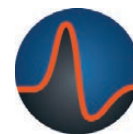
at a park. Or, perform squats while waiting for the coffee to brew. Sprinkling in small acts of exercise throughout the day will yield results.

- Suggest a family hike, bike ride, or backyard game. Burning calories and having fun is the best form of exercise!
- Be easy on yourself. Trying to maintain your normal workout routine is hard when gyms are closed. Look for free streaming programs on YouTube and other networks, or consult with fitness professionals, like physical therapists, to design a custom program for you.

MENTAL HEALTH:

- Consider coupling an enjoyable treat with necessary tasks, a process known as temptation coupling. For me, I love a good flavored seltzer. Whenever I have to do a task that is less than ideal (ie, clean the bathroom, home-school, yardwork), I grab a seltzer and consider it a treat.
- Try meditating. Proven through research to lower stress and anxiety, meditation, even if you’re not the Zen-type, can help create calm. There are several free apps like *Insight Timer* or *Calm* to help introduce you to the practice.
- Call a friend who makes you laugh, read a funny meme, tickle your kids until they can’t breathe. Smiling releases endorphins similar to exercise to elevate your mood, so show the pearly whites!

There is no doubt that COVID-19 will leave its mark on all of us, both in positive and negative ways. But, know that the struggles we face are real and are affecting all of us and we can overcome them with a small effort to refocus on the positive. On days where the positive seems intangible, know there is someone out there who cares about you and your well-being. Give them a call. And if they don’t answer, pick up this magazine and re-read this article, because I care. You are not alone. Together we will not only survive but *thrive*.



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