There are a lot of things that are currently out of our control and the feelings associated with that can be very uncomfortable and daunting. There are ways, however, to develop a personal sense of control that can help manage mental health and how we view the world in its current state.

Try these seven tips for greater mental health!

1. Create a routine.
With all the changes occurring in our day to day lives here recently, things can feel very out of whack. Having something that resembles structure can help when things feel out of control. Decide on two to three things that you can do daily that help you feel accomplished or can be designated as self-care. You can decide if you want these things to occur at the same time everyday or not. These can be things like setting a consistent wake-up and bedtime (it’s great for sleep hygiene), deciding on an activity that occurs everyday at a specific time like reading, doing a puzzle, FaceTime with friends or family, or learning a bit of a new skill every day. I’ll be listing some ideas at the end of this blog for skills you may want to try.

2. Stay away from news on social media.
We live in a world where there is an extreme amount of information all the time. Make sure to get your information about current health measures from reputable sources like the CDC and WHO. These sources are monitored and fact checked. Reading posts on social media can cause panic and a sense of uneasiness. Don’t trust everything you read. You don’t want to stress out over things that may not be accurate.
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3. Acknowledge feelings and thoughts you are having with a non-judgmental mind.
You feel upset, angry, sad, content, or heart broken. You’re grieving graduation, cancelled plans, the end of your semester, that is okay. Feelings are natural and thoughts are impossible to control. For example, do not think about a purple hippo. What are you thinking about? Most likely that purple hippo. Even if you try your hardest, you won’t truly be able to stop thinking about the hippo unless you allow yourself to think about it. Sounds counter-intuitive right? That’s the science. Since we can’t stop these experiences, it’s better to acknowledge, validate, and engage with them without judging ourselves or our experience.

4. Focus on your behavior.
Once you have engaged with number 3 above, you might find it is easier to focus on your behavior. I know it may sound weird, but as I mentioned above we can’t control our thoughts and feelings. We can, however, control how we react to them.

For example, you have to cancel your birthday party that is coming up this weekend. You can react to your sadness by isolating from your roommates who you are quarantined with or you could plan a Skype/Zoom birthday evening with trivia and dinner delivered from your favorite restaurant. Two very different approaches to the feelings and thoughts you may be having about canceling your birthday, but you still have the choice to decide how to react.

5. Engage in self-compassion.
It is hard sometimes to allow yourself to feel difficult emotions or sensations. There is also a lot going on right now, which might make it difficult to focus or feel as productive as you would like. When this occurs, allow yourself to say “that’s okay” or ask yourself “what would my best friend tell me in this situation?” We are often our harshest critics and this can help ease harsh self-criticism we may experience in this time of uncertainty.

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6. Come back to your physical body and focus on an activity that you are doing.
Ever watch Netflix or talk to someone while texting or checking social media? Yeah, we love to multitask. It makes us feel accomplished. But what if I told you staying in the moment with ONE activity could help you stay happier and feel better during this time of isolation? It’s true! Being more aware of your body and the tasks that you are engaging in can help overall wellbeing. We call this mindfulness. Here is an example of a way to practice this:

Stop what are you doing and look around the room. What are five things you can see? Three or four you can hear? Any smells or tastes? Notice what you are doing. Give your full attention to that task and do it without judgment.”

This technique takes practice, but anyone can do it! There are also great apps for that. I recommend Headspace, Calm, or Insight Timer.

7. Lastly, engage in Committed Action.
This means doing things that are driven by your values. It’s really easy to get caught in the monotony of doing the same things over and over, especially when it feels like what you can do is limited. Ask yourself, “what can I do right now, no matter how small, that improves my life or the life of those around me?”
Try to find things that are truly important to you that you can do on your own to keep yourself and those around you safe.

Need more support for your mental health or worry about a friend’s? Reach out to the OU University Counseling Center by calling 405-325-2911.

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Need ideas for a new skill to learn while self-quarantining? Maybe this list will help!

- Knitting/crocheting
- Learn to dance with online tutorials (shuffling, line-dancing, salsa, bachata, ballroom)
- Learn to bake or cook
- Start learning a new language
- Learn an instrument... Youtube has great tutorials.
- Try your hand at art (no one says it has to be a masterpiece)
- Take a free online class
- Learn to skate board, roller skate, or long board.
- Finish that series or video game you put on hold
- Origami
- Learn how to create memes
- Learn to fix something around the house
- Learn or practice yoga or how to do a handstand.

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