



April 22, 2020

Dear AUB community,

Increased stress is one of many effects of the COVID-19 crisis. We may be anxious about catching the disease, especially if we have underlying health conditions, or about vulnerable people around us catching the virus. This is on top of the additional pressures of economic hardship, isolation, and confinement because of the pandemic.

People react to stress in many different ways: feeling heightened anxiety; changing sleeping or eating patterns; having difficulty concentrating; using alcohol, or other substances; or using other coping strategies. These changes can have a strong impact on our physical and mental health.

In the following message, developed with the Department of Psychiatry and the Office of Student Affairs, we highlight initiatives for our faculty, staff, and students, and the broader AUB community, and provide some tips that anyone can implement to relieve their stress.

1- Mental health support for faculty and staff

Free, confidential mental health support is being made available to all AUB employees during the COVID-19 crisis. The service, offered by the Department of Psychiatry, in collaboration with the Employee Health Unit, with the support of the AUBHEALTH team, includes:

- **Short-term individual support** for people experiencing stress, worry, or interpersonal difficulties.
- **Virtual group sessions** to promote resilience for dealing with stressful situations.

All sessions are conducted remotely without needing a referral. Please call extension **3000** for an appointment or for more information.

2- Mental health services for people living with COVID-19 and their families

The Department of Psychiatry is offering an integrated mental health support system to anyone presenting for testing and admitted to the Pandemic Evaluation Clinic and Center (PECC), or for those who have been already diagnosed with COVID-19 and their families.

In line with international recommendations, all interventions are done safely using **telemedicine** in collaboration with medical and nursing colleagues in Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Pediatrics, Infectious Diseases, and Pulmonary/Critical Care who are at the frontline of this effort.

- **Virtual psychological group sessions, individual counseling and psychiatric evaluation** are offered to patients and their families.

For inquiries, please call extension **7375**.

3- Mental health tips

Members of the Department of Psychiatry are creating short videos on how to best cope with

stress during this period. Be on the lookout for these videos on AUB's social media platforms.

4- Mental health initiatives for AUB students

The Office of Student Affairs (OSA) has maintained constant contact with the students through emails and social media ([Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#)), spreading mental health awareness, information, and guidance to students. The Office of Student Affairs has maintained close coordination between all its units to ensure that students are connected to the services available to them and that matched their additional challenges. This ensures students can receive services from a multidisciplinary team (Counseling Center, Accessible Education Office, Student Wellness Outreach, Student Housing, Career Hub, Student Activities, etc).

The Counseling Center has also engaged students with the following initiatives:

- **Remote individual counseling support:** Through phone, email, and WebEx, this support line targets individuals who had already visited the center before the lockdown, in addition to new cases seeking support during these difficult times.
- **Support group for dorm residents:** led by the Student Wellness Outreach team, a support group for remaining dorm residents visited residents to offer support and follow-up phone calls for those unable to return to their homes.
- **Peer Support:** The Student Wellness Outreach and Peer Support Center has launched an initiative to provide supportive tips to students on a daily basis. These messages are by students for students. Peer supporters have also been engaged to provide insight on student concerns and student needs are highlighted for further follow-up.
- **Workshops:** The Student Wellness Outreach and the Counseling Center of OSA established a partnership with GradEx of the Graduate Council to conduct a workshop for students on how to succeed during the lockdown, shedding light on anxiety during the outbreak and sharing tips to improve virtual connectedness/support and attain academic success. Based on the positive feedback from of the pilot workshop, subsequent weekly workshops were announced and will continue weekly until the end of the Spring Semester.

5- General tips for better mental health

Looking after your own health and wellbeing by following these recommendations can be a great way to deal with stress.

- **Keeping routines:** Try as much as possible to keep to your personal daily routines or create new ones that are suited to the lockdown. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. [Exercise regularly, maintain regular sleep routines and eat healthy food.](#)
- **Physical isolation is not social isolation:** Being physically distant from other people does not mean you need to be socially isolated. Stay connected and maintain your social networks using telephone, email, video conferences, or social media (in moderation).
- **Listen to your emotions:** During times of stress, pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Do not dwell on your fears. Public health agencies and experts across the world are putting all their efforts into dealing with this unprecedented crisis.
- **Reduce the information overload:** The near-constant stream of news about any outbreak can cause anyone to feel anxious or stressed. Seek information updates and practical guidance at **specific times during the day** from official sources of information (MOPH and WHO) and avoid following rumors that make you feel uncomfortable.

We do not know how long it will be before we can resume our normal lives. In the meantime, please look after your mental health and of those around you, and use the services outlined

above.

Carine J. Sakr, MD, MPH
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