

# Inspire - Affirm - Engage

## In This Together

Many of you have been working hard to get healthy and maintain your health through this challenging time. The consequences of COVID-19 across our communities have thrown our routines off track, if not entirely out the window. You may be worried about your family, your job, your home, and other areas of your life.

We would like to focus this special issue on tools and resources that may be helpful in supporting you through this time. Perhaps you can find a few breaths between one worry and another. Perhaps you can reach for a healthier tool when you feel stressed instead of less healthy ones that you've done before.

More than ever we need each other and we need to stay engaged with our supports. We will all come out on the other side of this changed, different. Our wish is that you come out on the other side having taken care of yourself in the best way possible, given the circumstances that you're in.

Our teams are moving all visits to virtual visits (unless urgent) in order to continue to support you whether you are pre-surgery or post-surgery. We are working hard to ensure that everyone continues to progress. We are also mindful that these extraordinary circumstances may make us more prone to slip ups—slip ups in our goals, in our progress, in our habits. This is a call to remind ourselves about forgiveness and kindness, for part of taking care of ourselves is to be able to forgive our own mistakes. We are all in this together.

-Janet Ng, PhD, Randy Brandeis, LICSW & Carmela Pontillo, RN, MSN, CBN

## Tactical Breathing

One of the simplest ways to give yourself a chance to step away from a stressful situation or decision in the moment is to breathe into your diaphragm. Tactical breathing triggers the relaxation response in your body and reduces stress hormones. As with any new skill, practice several times a day first when calm for 5-10 min, then when you are feeling stressed.

- Lie on your back on a flat surface or in bed with your knees bent and your head supported.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.

- Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. Then hand on your chest should remain as still as possible
- As you breathe out on your exhale through your lips, tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward.

You may also practice in front of the mirror so you can see whether your chest hand is moving. As you gain more practice, you can try tactical breathing while sitting in a chair.



**All support groups have been cancelled at this time.**

Clinics remain open. Reach out by phone or MyChart to connect with your bariatric team.

**Kaiser Program Clinic**  
1-425-502-3454, option 3

**Overlake Program Clinic**  
1-425-467-3957



## Other Resources

Here is a list of additional resources that you may find helpful. As always, reach out to your care team with any questions or if you feel you would like additional support. Even if you are unsure, talk to your care team to see if follow-up is needed.

- Ways to virtually stay in touch with others: Zoom, Skype, Whatsapp, Facetime, Google Hangouts, YouTube live, phone/email/snail mail
- Sounds, images, and tools for relaxation can be found online. Search “self-care the calm place”
- Download free coloring books from libraries/museums online. There are also color by number apps for your mobile device.
- Continue to be physically active helps with mood and calm anxiety:
  - Walking while maintaining social distancing
  - Chair exercises (many online videos on YouTube)
  - Gardening
  - Use canned food or water bottles as weights
  - If you have indoor gym equipment (like a treadmill) now is the time to break it in!

If you want more information, here are two additional sites to read:

- Taking care of your mental health: [afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/](https://afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/)
- Review of square breathing (another focused breathing technique) and other skills: [health.harvard.edu/blog/coping-with-coronavirus-anxiety-2020031219183](https://health.harvard.edu/blog/coping-with-coronavirus-anxiety-2020031219183)

## Negotiating Stress

**Control:** We all like to be in control of our lives and the pandemic we currently face can tear away at the command we want in our lives. Focus in on the aspects of the situation that you can control. You cannot control whether you come down with the virus, but you can be in charge of implementing and honoring suggestions we have all been given by the medical community. You can control making sure that you are eating with regularity and practicing the behaviors that keep you healthy before or after bariatric surgery.

**Structure:** Provide yourself with structure if you are spending a lot of time at home now. Even simple habits such as getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, and getting dressed (not in pj's) will keep you focused and feeling more productive.

**Recess:** Find time during the day to get away from everything—even if you are not going outside, find time to mentally take a break from the news, from that project you've been working on, and do something that gives you healthy enjoyment and relaxation. Since you cannot go to the gym, you could think of ordering stretch bands, or find exercise videos online. There are many on YouTube.

**Gratitude:** There are likely silver linings in any crisis we face. Focus on what you have—perhaps now more time with family, realizing the strength of your neighborhood or community, or being able to connect with people you have not reached out to in some time.

**Perfection and Self-criticism:** This is a moment to remember to give yourself some grace if you can't get to all of your new self-care habits. Fear about weight regain is not helpful—seek support from others or your care team through a virtual visit. Feeling out of control can lead you to try to control things like eating habits. It may also lead to snacking uncontrollably or snacking/overeating to soothe feelings. Use tactical breathing to slow down your thoughts and emotions. If you've slipped up—call it that, a slip up, and focus on the next moment when you can do something different. Ask yourself, what would I say to my daughter/close friend/son/parent/loved one if they said they had made a mistake?

