



Spiritual health strategies for the COVID-19 pandemic

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Dear Editor,

According to the World Health Organization, "spiritual health refers to that part of the individual which reaches out and strives for meaning and purpose in life".[1] Spiritual health can be achieved through devotion, purity, dedication, charity, forgiveness, connectedness, faith in oneself, dealing smoothly with issues of death and death anxiety, prayer, yoga-meditation and positive thinking.[2] "Realization of one's Full Potential"; "Meaning and Purpose of Life"; and "Happiness From Within" are the three important aspects of spiritual health.[3]

During the current COVID-19 pandemic when people are staying home, and also staying away from others, it is important to focus on the spiritual dimension of health to prevent them from loneliness, boredom, anxiety, uncertainty and depression. The care of the soul should be integrated with the care of the body. Spiritual practices both religious (like prayer, yoga and charity) and non-religious (like creativity, art, exercise, humor and human values) can have positive health outcomes like an increase in self-confidence and in assertiveness, reduced stress, better

survival, less addiction, less severe medical illness, improved quality of life, cooperativeness and productivity.[4,5] People should strive to clear their minds of fearful thoughts, and try to be responsible and to grow in positivity. Spiritual behaviors like learning core values, spiritual reading including inspirational stories and motivational poems, offering prayers, supporting social causes, showing unconditional love and being compassionate can do wonders. Spirituality has also been found helpful in the prevention of many diseases, in supporting bereavement issues, in better coping with diseases, and in hastening recovery.[6]

Obesity in people aged less than 60 years has been reported in the US as a newly identified epidemiologic risk factor for COVID-19 which may contribute to increased morbidity rates, hospital admission and need for critical care.[7] Maintaining a healthy lifestyle through proper diet, sleep and exercise are therefore necessary. Adopting "mindful" eating practices with a healthy balanced diet is the need of the hour. Smoking increases the chances of virus transmission from fingers to mouth.[8] Individuals should

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refrain from smoking, alcohol intake, and drug abuse during the COVID era, and better still, can try to draw inner strength through meditation and take the viral threat as an opportunity to leave such addictions (if any). The non-availability of addictive products coupled with an inner desire towards spirituality and good health can be a strong motivation to de-addict oneself. [9,10] By adopting healthy practices there will be a decrease in autonomic activity, release of stress and a lowering of blood pressure.[8] Mind-body interventions such as relaxation, stress management, and meditation whether used alone or in combination with lifestyle modifications have been evaluated as potential treatments for elevated blood pressure.[11]

All three of these factors are associated with a higher mortality in COVID-19. It is, thus, worth considering spirituality and healthy living for this reason alone. Perhaps, looking "inwards" when we cannot go out is an opportunity in disguise.

Further studies are required to establish a relationship between spirituality and COVID-19; however, it appears to potentially strengthen the ability of the general public and of COVID-19 patients to respond to the virus. Hence, it is suggested that adopting a strategy towards encouraging spiritual behavior could help people in surviving the lockdown and the virus, and also in achieving overall health and happiness.

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