

# STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

## DEPRESSION & COVID-19

Symptoms of depression are common, yet crisis can exacerbate these symptoms. Below are some evidence-based tools to help you cope with depression at any time, and especially during a crisis like COVID-19.

### Take a warm bath twice a week.

Studies suggest that this can affect heart rate, metabolism, nerve stimulation and cardiac output. These can boost immune function and provide a general sense of being refreshed.



**Exercise.** Numerous research studies have shown that exercise, such as jogging, cycling, walking, dancing, and gardening, can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. It can help distract you from negative thoughts and provide a sense of self-efficacy.



**Engage in service.** Helping others can start the release of our “feel good” brain chemicals. This has been referred to as the “helper’s

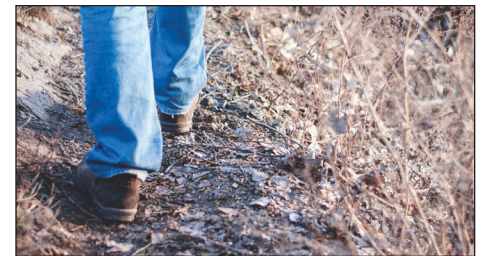
high” in research. Examples of helping during the pandemic could include calling/video chatting with an elderly relative, delivering groceries to an elderly neighbor, playing online games or cards with an isolated friend or family member, writing thank you cards to people on the “front lines” of the pandemic, donating money to a fund to help those affected by COVID-19, writing postcards for a political campaign you believe in, and dropping off food or supplies at local collections sites.



**Read a book for 30 minutes.** Step away from your screens. Book reading has been associated with less stress and more positive psychological outcomes. Studies have found that reading can help lower blood pressure, heart rate and feelings of psychological distress.

**Call or video chat with a friend.** Connection is an important part of mental health. We are hard

wired for connection and talking to people who make you laugh, are optimistic or who just accept you exactly as you are can help you combat symptoms of depression.



### Practice behavioral activation.

When we are stressed or feeling low, we may think about taking a walk and think, “Ugh, I don’t want to do that.” Getting up and doing it anyway, a form of “fake it till you make it,” can actually help shift our thinking to “It’s not so bad” and even to “That was nice, I enjoyed getting out of the house for a bit.” Behavioral activation, simply put, is doing something that aligns with the life you want to be leading, even when you do not feel like doing it. Doing it anyway can bring positive ripple effects into your experience and help lift your mood. Choose specific, positive actions, notice and acknowledge if you feel any resistance then do it anyway and notice any positive changes in how you feel.