



Most nurses are experts at coping under a reasonable amount of stress every day and usually manage to return home ready to take on our personal & family responsibilities. On-going acute stress can severely deplete immune system function.<sup>24</sup> AHNA is aware that the elements that typically keep you healthy may be inaccessible during this state of emergency. We have devised a toolbox of quick practices so no matter how short the self-care moment, your immune system has a chance to catch up!



### Sleep

Deprivation of sleep prevents the immune system from creating and releasing cytokines used for fighting infection or stress. While 7-8 hours per night is ideal, try sleeping as many consecutive hours as possible. Research studies on nightshift nurses taking a mid-shift nap showed successful improvement of concentration and cognition compared to those who did not nap.<sup>9</sup> Create a sleep ritual to decompress: Lavender oil applied to the soles of the feet, nape of neck, or temples can effectively induce relaxation, reduction of tension headaches, and restful sleep.

### Hydration

Body Weight divided by 2 = daily Ounces of Water Intake. Drinking water becomes even more important in times of stress; the physical response to stress mimics that of dehydration.<sup>16</sup> Nurses should take additional measures to increase hydration while under stress. Prioritize self-checks for darker yellow or amber urine, constipation, headaches, dry mouth, energy loss, or decreased turgor and actively hydrate when these symptoms are observed.

- 1) Drink two glasses of water as soon as you wake up. Drinking at least 16-24 oz of water first thing before a 12-hour shift will help set you up for success. By making significant progress early in the day, hitting your water goals will seem more attainable.
- 2) Eat your water. Fruits and vegetables are not only excellent break room snacks, but they are loaded with water that contributes towards your total water intake for the day.

Unit Managers: Anticipate alternative methods for staff hydration needs. Consider wearable hydration packs beneath scrubs / PPE, this expedites hydration in moments when mask removal is possible.



### Nutrition

A diet high in antioxidants decreases free radicals preventing symptoms of brain-fog from vitamin and mineral deficiency.<sup>2,20</sup> Fermented foods, or yogurt, stimulate natural killer cell activity, and type I interferon production.<sup>7</sup> Quick bite high antioxidant 'finger foods' will be helpful during long shifts: walnuts, celery, blueberries, tart cherries, spinach or salad in a wrap, orange vegetables and fruits, pineapple bites, avocado slices, or chia in yogurt.<sup>21</sup> Seasoning with tumeric, ginger,<sup>17</sup> onions, garlic, and super-food powders such as spirulina, provide anti-inflammatory properties. Try limiting caffeine, nicotine, and processed foods as these suppress the immune system.<sup>3</sup>



### Movement

Movement is an antidote for the impact of stress on cells.<sup>23</sup> When planned exercise is not plausible, taking brief moments to move is simultaneously healing and energizing; walk outside during breaks or mealtime, climb the stairs, or park and walk. Yoga can stimulate the thymus gland producing & moving white blood cells. Movement improves lymphatic drainage, gut health,<sup>28</sup> and micro-circulation through the organs and extremities. A 10 minute yoga or stretching practice opens joints, releases synovial fluid, and improves awareness; any movement that feels good, is good! Many websites have free short stretch or yoga sequences for your break time.



SCAN ME

## Self-Affirmation

The mind has the ability to create endorphins that benefit us psychologically, and physically.<sup>25</sup> Louise Hay's philosophies remain a valuable resource for nurses to use in stress reduction. Positive affirmations are beneficial in any frequency at any time- the goal is to retrain the brain to lean toward positive discerning thoughts.<sup>8</sup> Create your own Affirmation: Start with the words "I am;" these are the two most powerful words in the English language. Use present tense & state your affirmation in positive tense. Keep it brief & specific. Include a dynamic action word.

I am a Nurse.  
I am Resilient.  
**MY PRESENCE  
MAKES A  
DIFFERENCE.**  
and  
**I AM  
UNSTOPPABLE.**

## Meditation

Cultivating mindfulness reduces cortisol.<sup>10</sup> Start by focusing on the breath without trying to change it. Notice the sensation of air moving into and out of the body. When ready, gently release that focus and simply observe moment-to-moment experience with full attention. Distracting thoughts are part of the practice, but they will gradually slow & become meaningful when mindfulness increases. Much of the emotional distress we experience results from worry over that which has happened, or, anticipating negative events yet to occur.<sup>24</sup> Spend this time trying to maintain focus on one moment in time:

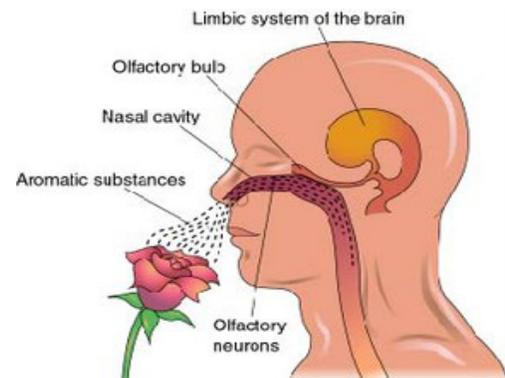
THIS ONE



## Aromatherapy

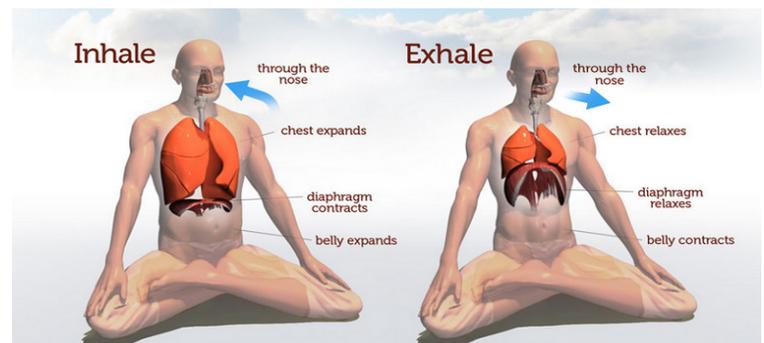
Essential oils have gained notoriety for their anti-viral, anti-microbial, and anti-inflammatory properties.<sup>5,12,30</sup> Recent studies of Essential Oils of Frankincense<sup>14</sup>, clove<sup>15</sup>, oregano<sup>4</sup>, cinnamon<sup>6,19</sup>, & rosemary<sup>1</sup> demonstrated anti-infective properties. Research has shown several 'protective blends' of the latter to be effective against multiple organisms, including viral particles.<sup>11,13,22</sup> Topical application, diluted with a carrier oil and applied directly to the soles of the feet, is sufficient & many experience results within 20 minutes. For sore shoulders, necks and backs: individuals report pain relief after a topical application of Cypress, Marjoram, and /or Peppermint to the painful area. Adding these to an epsom salt bath may concurrently filter systemic toxins. For relief of tension, stress, or balancing emotions, inhalation or diffusion carries the essential oil through the nostril, directly to the limbic system.<sup>1,27</sup>

Note: OTC essential oils produced using chemical splicing can be toxic. Essential oils obtained from a reputable source are safer to assume efficacy.



## Get Outdoors & Breathe!

Briskly walking, or taking lunch outdoors, increases endorphins.<sup>23</sup> Commit to 15 minutes outside when possible. To perform diaphragmatic breathing, concentrate on a deep breath. **INHALE:** Feel your belly expand. Take another deep sip of air and fill up your lungs completely. **EXHALE:** Open your mouth, allow your tongue to rest and exhale with a HAAaahhh sound. Imagine healthy lungs filtering toxins, then exhale, releasing what is not beneficial.<sup>29</sup> Diaphragmatic breathing exercise reduces anxiety and stress.<sup>18</sup> Practicing even a few times daily for 2-3 weeks helps "reset" healthy breathing.



All of the above are evidence-based.

For References go to <https://bit.ly/39ivylY>

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