



# StAR LAB NEWSLETTER

StAR Lab Newsletter | Issue 3 | April 2020

This is the official newsletter of the Stress & Healthy Aging Research Laboratory

The StAR Lab is dedicated to understanding factors that determine cognitive health and psychosocial wellbeing in later life, and to evaluate methods to optimize healthy aging.

Visit our Website!

To learn more about the lab and it's members, please visit us!

<https://psychlabs.ryerson.ca/starlab/>

## The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a time of uncertainty. Within a short period of time, we have been forced change our lives as we know it; minimizing or ceasing our routine daily activities, and physically distancing ourselves from our community. As a results many individuals are experiencing higher than normal levels of stress.

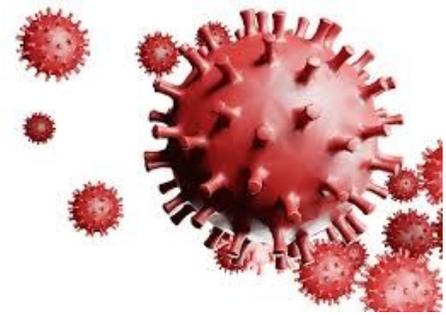


Photo: <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/covid-19-coronavirus-corona-virus-4996393/>

While the objective of the StAR Lab Newsletter is to disseminate research stemming from the Stress and Healthy Aging Research Laboratory, this issue is dedicated to presenting evidence-based self-care practices for the cultivation of wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Understanding *why* this situation is creating stress:

The first step to managing our stress is to understand *why* we are experiencing stress in the first place. Some of you may be thinking that the answer is rather simple — we are facing a pandemic that has resulted in a number of deaths across the globe! — but it is actually a little more complex than that. Over two decades of stress research has shown that there are special *ingredients* to a stressor . . .

# Ingredients to Stress

Before you can manage your stress, it is important to understand why the situation is stressful *for you*.

You need one or more of the following ingredients to perceive something as stressful. The acronym used for these ingredients is **N.U.T.S** :

## Novelty:

This is the first time that you are experiencing this situation.

**Context:** This is our first pandemic and our first time exposed to this particular virus.

## Unpredictability:

You are unable to predict how this situation will unfold.

**Context:** We are unable to predict with certainty when our lives will "go back to normal".

## Threat to ego:

You may be negatively evaluated, either by yourself or others.

**Context:** This ingredient may look different for many of us. Loss of employment, not being able to support or care for loved ones, feeling guilt for not being able to engage in our usual activities, feeling like a target due to our race or age. The list can go on and on....

**Sense of control is low:** You have no control over the situation itself.

**Context:** We have no control over the coronavirus.



Photo: <https://www.pickpik.com/almond-eat-flower-tasty-healthy-food-122327>

## Did You Know?

- Coronaviruses, abbreviated CoV, is named for its structure which resembles a crown shape.
- Before 2019, only 6 kinds of coronaviruses that infect humans were identified. One of these viruses was SARS (SARS-CoV, 2013).
- The 2019-nCoV is the virus that we are facing today. This name was chosen by the World Health Organization (i.e., novel coronavirus identified in 2019). The disease stemming from the virus is COVID-19.
- For more facts about the coronavirus, visit the World Health Organization (WHO):

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>



## Managing your N.U.T.S

**Novelty:** The COVID-19 pandemic is novel. However, we are adaptable beings and are faced with novelty more often than we realize. If there is one certainty in life, it is that of impermanence and knowing that *this too shall pass*.

**Unpredictability:** This pandemic is unpredictable, and many of us keep asking “when are things going to go back to normal?”. The problem with this *need* to predict our future is that it often prevents us from adapting to our current situation. In order to manage this ingredient, it is important to live your life *now*, not when the pandemic is over. Although your daily routine may look different, it can still nourish your mind and body. Try to think about how you can create your “new normal”.

**Threat to ego:** This ingredient may show up as guilt, shame, self-doubt, and self-judgment, all of which enhance the experience of stress and may jeopardize our wellbeing. In order to manage this ingredient, it is important to practice acceptance of *what is* (i.e., acceptance of our current reality) and self-compassion. The practice of mindfulness meditation fosters the development of these healthy attitudes.

**Sense of control is low:** To help manage this ingredient, you must be completely honest with the things that you can and cannot control.

### What you *cannot* control:

- The existence of CoV, the number of people who have been infected across the globe, and other people’s behaviours in how they are managing (or not managing) the pandemic.



## COVID-19 Research We want to hear from YOU!

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The StAR Lab is interested in learning about your experience with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Older adults aged 65+ years are invited to participate in a 1hr one-on-one interview via Zoom.

Participants will be entered into a draw for a 75\$ gift card of their choosing.

For more information, please contact:

**afiocco@psych.ryerson.ca**  
and include **COVID-19 Study**  
in the subject heading

### What you *can* control:

- Engaging in your civic duties by washing your hands, avoiding social groups and practicing physical distancing. You can also control the types of self-harm and self-care behaviours that you choose to engage in.

# Healthy Living During COVID-19... and beyond!

Research shows that the following lifestyle behaviours promote wellbeing and a strong immune system, which we all need at this time.

**Remain socially connected:** Although we need to practice physically distancing, it is vital to remain socially connected with friends and family. Set up scheduled virtual meetings (or telephone calls) with loved ones. You can also get a little creative by scheduling virtual “tea time”, or “happy hour” with friends and family.

**Remain physically active:** It is easy to become sedentary during this time due to facility closures. Luckily, walking is the cheapest form of exercise. Walk around the block in your neighbourhood, while practicing physical distancing at the same time. Other options include dancing to music in your living room or streaming one of the many yoga videos on YouTube.

**Eat healthy:** Our previous newsletter discussed the benefits of a prudent diet for brain health. A healthy diet also promotes a strong immune system. In addition to getting the right macronutrients in your diet (e.g., lean protein, healthy fats, complex carbohydrates), it is important to get the right amount of micronutrients, namely, vitamins. Vitamin C and B-complex are important supplements that support immune function, especially during times of stress as these vitamins are easily depleted when we are feeling stressed.

**Minimize and prioritize:** Bring awareness to your consumption of news and other media and recognize whether it is doing more harm than good. Prioritize what is important to you and what supports your wellbeing. This is not the time to create an extensive to-do list. Be kind to yourself and work within your personal parameters of what is safe and what is possible.



## Our Mindful Community

In response to COVID-19, we are offering a weekly mindfulness meditation session via Zoom on Thursdays from 10:30am to 12pm.

Each session provides us with an opportunity to check-in — with others and with ourselves — and to engage in a mindfulness meditation practice.

If you are interested in joining, please email:

[afiocco@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:afiocco@psych.ryerson.ca)

And include **Our Mindful Community** in the subject heading.