

5 Ways to Stay Present During a Pandemic by The Innerwork Center

In the midst of a pandemic, we are all being tested in new ways. Navigating the uncertainty of our physical health, our financial future and mental welfare along with added responsibilities of caring for those we love 'at a distance' is tough. No one is immune to the challenges we face during pandemic as a nation and as individuals. When we can't control what's happening 'out there' we turn to innerwork for self care and peace of mind.

1. **BREATHE.** Inhale deeply. Relax your jaw as you exhale fully. Breathing in this way, focusing on the exhale, helps you stimulate your vagus nerve—which is now known to have beneficial effects on managing stress, anxiety, and even inflammation by activating the "relaxation response" of your parasympathetic nervous system.
2. **SENSE YOUR BODY/MOVE YOUR BODY.** Pay attention to how your body feels against the support of a chair or the floor beneath you. Stand and stretch, in ways that feel right. If possible, engage in yoga or gentle movement or take a walk. Moving helps remind us of our mind-body connection.
3. **OPEN YOUR EYES.** See where you are. Orient yourself in your surroundings. Notice what is around you. This can ground you to the present moment. Savor the present moment. Remember that most troubling thoughts happen in the past or the future.
4. **NAME YOUR EXPERIENCE.** Use descriptive words to name what you're struggling with...like "planning," "grief," or "sadness." Naming your emotions can remove some of the judgement and give you a chance to show yourself some compassion.
5. **BE YOUR OWN FRIEND.** Be kind to yourself when you feel the sting of self-critical thoughts. Place a hand over your heart or on your cheek. Say to yourself something like "it's okay to feel this way" or "all is well right now." You can treat yourself like you would treat a friend.

If you've tried all of the above suggestions and are still struggling, reach out for support! Talk to a friend, neighbor, or enroll in a class on self care at The Innerwork Center and learn from faculty who have been studying and practicing self care and well-being for decades. Remember that you're not in this alone! You can find our *Self Care in a Pandemic* series at www.innerworkcenter.org/selfcare