CRNAs and SRNAs face continued disruptions to clinical practice, training, and day-to-day life from the uncertainty, personal and professional disruptions, and restrictions of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The AANA is here for you – advocating for appropriate PPE, full practice authority, frontline healthcare professionals’ behavioral health and psychological first aid, and paycheck protection; curating clinical recommendations, guidelines, and resources; providing information and ways to support your physical, mental, emotional, and financial well-being as invaluable professionals in this unprecedented pandemic. We are here for you.

Caring for Self and Others

COVID-19 studies indicate this pandemic is creating echo epidemics in substance use disorder and mental health challenges across all populations and especially in frontline healthcare professionals. The initial acute stress and ongoing distress threatens everyone’s mental, emotional, physical and cognitive well-being. While each may respond differently, it’s important to recognize stress, distress, and trauma and seek healthy ways to cope. Prioritize your own well-being to continue to care for yourself, your loved ones, and your patients.

Be Aware of Stress

Changes in Behavior, Feelings and Cognition

- Increases in irritability, impatience, crying, blaming, arguing, substance use (alcohol, drugs, tobacco), desire to be alone, anxiety, fear, anger, distrust, worry, sadness, frustration, uncertainty, resentment, guilt, confusion, startle response, headaches, stomach aches, other pains, worsening of chronic health problems

- New difficulties in giving or accepting help, finding pleasure, concentrating, and decision-making

- Increase/decrease in energy or activity levels, fatigue, and appetite

- Revisiting past trauma/PTSD – intrusive distressing memories, flashbacks, and nightmares

AANA.com/covidwellness

Continually updated resources, topics include:

- Be Aware of Stress
  - Ways to relieve stress
  - CRNA-produced wellness content
  - Free wellness services and helpful apps
  - Students and coping
  - Financial/employment related stress
  - Physical well-being: fitness and fatigue

- Peer Support – Giving and Receiving
  - Conversation tips to support a colleague
  - Online peer support options and warmlines
  - Support The Front – virtual peer support

- Ask for Help: The When, Where, and How for Mental Health Needs
  - Mental and emotional well-being
  - Organizational resources and data
  - Articles from the front lines

- Giving Back

Grief and Healing

Healthcare Leadership Support for Clinician Well-being

Covid-19 & Alcohol and Other Drugs

Photo Credit: Dan Lovinaria, DNP, MBA, APRN, CRNA
Ways to Relieve Stress

Be aware of how you’re feeling and try healthy coping techniques to lessen anxiety, reinforce your immune system, and care for psychological needs:

- Breathe deeply
- Practice staying in the moment and in perspective
- Take care of your body - eating healthy, exercising, and getting enough sleep
- Enjoy cooking, preparing, and sharing meals in your safety circle
- Use healthy apps to add variety, fun, and convenience
- Avoid overreliance on food, alcohol or other drugs
- If in recovery, participate in online support groups
- Create a schedule and prioritize self-care
- Take a day off, create space between work and home
- Request time to process after a traumatic event
- Connect with others (virtually or safe social distancing)
- Be kind to one another
- Limit COVID-19 news to credible sources
- Focus on what’s good in a gratitude journal
- Accentuate the positive - reframe negative experiences
- Hold support conversations with peers (buddy system) on common feelings/experiences
- Share healthcare knowledge to inform the general public
- Become aware of unresolved stress on mental well-being
- Ask for mental health support as needed, during and after the pandemic

Try the Navy SEAL breathing technique (Box breathing)

1. Inhale for 4 seconds
2. Hold lungs full for 4 seconds
3. Exhale for 4 seconds
4. Hold lungs empty for 4 seconds
5. Repeat as necessary

Learn more about this technique: quietkit.com/box-breathing

There are also many options for more formalized virtual peer support. See AANA.com/covidwellness Peer Support – Giving & Receiving for conversation tips to help support a colleague, online peer support resources, and warm lines.

Ask for Help: The When, Where and How for Mental Health Needs

When feelings or symptoms worsen, affect your ability to function, have wide swings, or seem to be prolonged, more than peer/social support is needed. Seek advice from a mental health professional and know you can recover. Tele-therapy options are expanding, more readily available, and often free. See AANA.com/covidwellness Ask for Help: The When, Where and How for Mental Health Needs for guidance on when professional help is needed, where to find tele-therapy and professional counseling, as well as information on removing the stigma of care for mental health.

- If you have a mental health condition, maintain your therapy, and schedule for prescribed meds, if applicable, and watch for effect of stress for adjustments when needed.

SOURCES
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Nurses Association: Six Tips for Nursing Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic
Institute for Health Care Improvement: “Psychological PPE,” Promote Health Care Workforce Mental Health and Well-Being
The Joint Commission: Resilience for Second Victims During and After COVID-19
The Well-being Initiative: Nurses’ Guide to Mental Health Support Services
SAMHSA: Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health, Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, And Isolation During an Infectious Disease Outbreak; Coping with Stress during Infectious Disease outbreaks SAMHSA

Peer Support: Giving & Receiving

Mental health professionals recommend seeking emotional support, such as social support from peers or self-help groups, to normalize feelings and process trauma. Peers are colleagues in your workplace or school, CRNAs and other healthcare friends near and far, who face similar challenges. In an informal setting, you can give and receive peer support by talking about your COVID-19 feelings and fears, sharing reliable information and resources, and how you’re finding balance in this stressful time.