



Hope and Grace: Finding Joy During Anxious Times A Message from Within Our Community



Some of us check the news each day or each hour, searching for the latest predictions about the spread of illness or about how long the current quarantine will last. We analyze social media or our online feed of choice, pouring over public health updates from thousands of miles away or from those closer to home. Some of us worry about relatives far away, or just a room away, within our care.

All of us struggle with the constant, unyielding opaqueness of the unknown - and we do so while looking after children, while working full time, while cleaning our homes, while trying to stay on top of our responsibilities and, perhaps, while trying to chase some sunshine and some exercise each day.

*Today I offer you some balm for what can feel like pervasive anxiety. Below, **Prerana Sangani Shenoy, MD, MPH**, and mother to **Pooja ('20)** and **Aashna ('22)** shares the following piece, titled "Hope and Grace," which she wrote for her medical practice in Woodside, *The Village Doctor*. She offers calm, practical advice for staying centered, focusing on mindfulness, and continuing to bring joy into your life.*

Prerana reminds us that we are not alone, and that amidst many things that we cannot control, there are some things that we can.

Thank you for the reminder, and for the hope, Prerana. I wish you all joy this Spring Break.

Matt

Hope and Grace

These last few weeks we all have experienced a change in our daily rhythm that we likely have never experienced in our lifetimes. With that change, there can be uncertainty, fear and sadness. But there can be joy, goodness and strength if we look for it. The collective human spirit is powerful and harnessing your own piece of this is within your control. I'd like to share with you, things you can do today to help alleviate some of the anxiety.

First, limit your time reading and watching media coverage of the day's events. Try to select an amount of time - 30 or 45 minutes a day - and spend the rest reading other books, listening to music or talking to friends.

Second, pick an activity that you know brings you joy and promise yourself to do it daily. It could be taking a walk, playing with your pet, dancing with your kids in the living room or cooking a mouth-watering dinner. These activities release endorphins and we all need a truckload of them right now.

Third, be kind. You've heard this before and I'll say it again, because it bears repeating:

kindness is powerful. Doing anything else has negative consequences. Kindness and its close neighbor, generosity, release oxytocin and activate parts of the brain that build trust, social connectedness, and warmth. It also decreases your blood pressure and can have immediate effects on your feelings of anxiety. Talk to a friend who is having a hard day, help a neighbor, share your talents: your community will welcome you.

Fourth, build your mindfulness. This may be the time you start on this path. Deep breathing has enormous benefits to your physical, emotional and brain health. Since many of us are at home, what a great opportunity to try some specific breathing techniques. There is one I will share with you because I think it is easy to learn and portable, it can be done anywhere. It is called the 4-7-8 breathing.

- *Take a moment to find a quiet place and a comfortable position, sitting or resting with eyes closed;*
- *Place your tongue behind the ridge of your upper teeth so your mouth is slightly open;*
- *Rest, inhale for a mental count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7 and then exhale slowly for a count of 8;*
- *Repeat no more than 4 times;*
- *It is the exhale that is important in this exercise and holds the benefits.*

As you practice daily, you will notice your heart rate comes down and your irritability will decrease. After 2 weeks, you can increase the breaths to 8 per session or the frequency to twice per day.

I truly believe that we all will come through this time with new tools that we find within ourselves. Even though we are physically apart, we can emotionally lift each other up. Try watching any one of the many balcony sing-a-longs across the world. From birthdays, anniversaries and a wonderful neighborhood parade, to the welcome a young girl returning from her final chemotherapy received.

Take comfort in noticing the small bits of the extraordinary happening around us. I'm grateful knowing we are all in this together.
