



START THE  
**CONVERSATION**



**WELLNESS**  
**IN TOUGH TIMES**

# START THE CONVERSATION



## **N** Wellness in Tough Times

EXTENSION [ruralwellness.unl.edu](http://ruralwellness.unl.edu)

**Are you feeling stressed, anxious, angry or overwhelmed? You are not alone.**

The 2019 disaster events worsened challenges for rural Nebraskans already experiencing stress from a downturn in the agricultural economy. For many, the COVID-19 pandemic is creating additional challenges that affect our mental health and quality of life.

It is important to stay connected during tough times. **Sometimes reaching out is what makes us Nebraska Strong.**

The Wellness in Tough Times grant project focuses on providing stress-reducing resources and support to rural Nebraskans. The project is supported by Nebraska Extension, Midwest Early Recovery Fund and Peter Kiewit Foundation. If you received this mailing, your community is part of this project.

We are here to support you during this challenging time.

**Let's start the conversation!**

### OUR SPONSORS



# VIDEOS MADE JUST FOR YOU!

## Start the Conversation: Taking Care During Tough Times

Nebraska Extension invites you to watch a series of videos with strategies to improve your well-being and reduce stress during this challenging time. The four-part series, led by Dr. Christine Chasek, can be viewed on your computer or smart phone. Audio recordings are also available.

### VIDEOS

#### COVID-19: Go Away! (How are you coping?)

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought so many uncertainties to daily life and challenges to our mental well-being. How are you coping? Watch to see how you can stay in the healthy zone.

#### Are You at Your Wit's End?

Staying home and staying healthy has everyone spending a lot of time together. Are you at your wit's end? Watch to see how you can adapt to the new normal.

#### Where's the Money?

As if the ag economy wasn't struggling enough, along comes COVID-19 with more economic unknowns. Watch to see how you can keep hope and peace alive in this difficult time.

#### Gratitude Makes You Attractive

Gratitude is the most attractive human characteristic you can possess. Watch to find out how to cultivate it!



#### **Christine Chasek, LIMHP, LADC**

*Associate Professor, Counseling and School Psychology, University of Nebraska at Kearney*

*Director, Behavioral Health Education Center, Kearney*

Dr. Chasek is a practicing clinician with strong rural roots after starting life in the Panhandle and migrating to a small rural town in central Nebraska. She is passionate about the emotional health of Nebraska's rural families and communities.

 Watch videos at [go.unl.edu/ruralwellness](http://go.unl.edu/ruralwellness)



# TAKE STEPS TO MANAGE YOUR STRESS

## 7 Ways to Manage Your Stress Today

1. Practice self-care through breathing and relaxation. Take a few minutes every day to take some deep breaths and think positive thoughts.
2. Start a journal. After thinking positive thoughts, take it a step further and write them down.
3. Stay connected. Right now, it's important to keep distance, but that doesn't mean people can't connect through social media, texts or phone calls.
4. Find someone trusted to share feelings of stress and anxiety with, talk about what you're feeling to really process those thoughts.
5. Have some fun. Watch a favorite movie, go for a walk, play a game, etc.
6. Don't overexpose yourself to information about the pandemic. It's important to stay informed, but don't let it consume your valuable time.
7. Continue doing the big three: exercise (at home or outside, not at local gyms), maintain a healthy diet and get a good night's sleep.

## 4 Ways to Help Your Children Cope with Stress

1. Answer children's questions and talk about the pandemic and current situation with them.
2. Assure your children they are safe and that your family and community are prepared to handle the situation.
3. Limit children's exposure to social media and news coverage of the pandemic.
4. Keep structure in their lives and help them plan a routine for their day, just like they'd have if they were at school.



Source: David Miers, Ph.D., LIPC, Bryan Health



## Practice Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body. When you breathe deeply, it sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. The brain then sends this message to your body.

Try this simple technique:

- Get comfortable. You can lie on your back in bed or on the floor with a pillow under your head and knees. Or you can sit in a chair with your shoulders, head and neck supported against the back of the chair.
- Place one hand on your belly. Place the other hand on your chest.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose for four seconds. Let your belly fill with air.
- Breathe out through your nose for at least five seconds.
- Repeat three or more times for best effect.

Source: WebMD.com



## Listen & Learn

Would you like to know more about a health topic, or tips to stay well? Nebraska doctors and health experts offer practical, useful advice for a lifetime of good health — available to you at work, home or on-the-go.

Listen to or download a free 10-minute podcast today at [bryanhealth.com/bryan-health-podcasts](https://bryanhealth.com/bryan-health-podcasts)

Source: Bryan Health



## Make Sleep a Priority

How much sleep did you get last night? If you live in Nebraska, where current stress levels are high, there is about a 30% chance that it was less than seven hours. This amount of sleep is not enough to recharge your body and brain.

Respect your body's need for adequate sleep and make it a priority in daily routines.

4 ways to get better sleep:

1. Go to bed and, more importantly, get up at the same time every day. This is crucial for setting our biological clocks. Use the alarm clock the right way... no snooze button! Get up and out of bed on time, even while isolating at home.
2. Sleep in a room temperature of 60 to 68 degrees.
3. Turn off all devices while sleeping so there is no lighting up, dinging, vibrating or ringing. Phone alarms still work in silenced or airplane modes.
4. Allow your eyes to take in plenty of bright light first thing in the morning and avoid it in the evening. Lower lights in the house after the sun goes down and make sleep spaces as dark as possible.

Find more sleep tips at [go.unl.edu/sleeptips](https://go.unl.edu/sleeptips)

Source: Susan Harris, Rural Health, Wellness and Safety, Nebraska Extension



## Start Gardening

Gardening allows you to enjoy being outside, get fresh air and exercise, and grow fruits and vegetables. Use this opportunity at home to raise your own food — dig in and soak up a little vitamin D!

Find gardening tips and tricks on Nebraska Extension's Horticulture blog at [nebrgardener.wordpress.com](https://nebrgardener.wordpress.com)

# STAY CONNECTED

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## Conversation Starters

### Staying connected during social distancing:

1. Find a pen pal! Go back to the basics and write a letter to a friend or family member. Writing is a good exercise to express how you are feeling about your current situation.
2. Schedule a virtual “hangout” with friends or family using an online video system such as FaceTime or Zoom. If you would normally have coffee with friends each week, continue to schedule this “catch-up time” by video.
3. Call a neighbor or friend to check on how they are doing.
4. If you are healthy, offer to run an errand for an elderly neighbor. Helping others can help us feel connected and gives us a sense of purpose during this difficult time.
5. Go for a walk and greet others from a safe distance.
6. If you are home with family members, play a board game or do an activity that requires everyone to put their screens aside.
7. Practice being comfortable with your own thoughts. Use 15 minutes a day to reflect on the positives in your life and use “I am grateful for \_\_\_\_\_” statements.
8. Go for a drive with a family member to a place you have never been.
9. Go fishing with a friend and enjoy time together at a safe distance.
10. Begin a virtual book club.

“Hey, we haven’t talked in a while. How are you?”

“Are you OK? You don’t seem like yourself lately.”

“Hey, you seemed frustrated today. I’m here for you.”

“It seems like something’s up. Do you want to talk about what’s going on?”

“I’m worried about you and would like to know what’s up so I can help.”



### Check in on Friends & Family

Talking to a friend or family member about their mental health can be awkward, but it can make a real difference in their well-being. Start the conversation today.



# ENJOY FAMILY FOOD & FUN AT HOME



**Eating nutritious food is a great way to enhance your health and well-being. Be creative with recipes, get your children involved and use what you have on hand. For example, adding vegetables to soups can be an easy way to use up any canned and frozen vegetables.**

- ▶ Find cooking tips and ideas for family-friendly meals and snacks at: [food.unl.edu/article/family-food-fun-home](https://food.unl.edu/article/family-food-fun-home)
- ▶ See how many “healthy food access Bingo” squares you can check off: [go.unl.edu/healthy-food-access-bingo](https://go.unl.edu/healthy-food-access-bingo)
- ▶ Explore ideas for meal planning, use of commodity foods and other resources to improve your health: [food.unl.edu/nep-materials](https://food.unl.edu/nep-materials)



## Six Can Chicken Tortilla Soup (6 servings)

### Ingredients:

- 1 (15 ounce) can corn, drained
- 2 (14.5 ounce) cans low sodium chicken broth
- 1 (10 ounce) can chicken, drained
- 1 (15 ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (10 ounce) can diced tomatoes with green chilies, drained
- 6 ounces tortilla chips
- 3 ounces low-fat cheddar cheese, shredded

### Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. In a large saucepan, combine corn, chicken broth, chicken, black beans and tomatoes.
3. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer until heated through.
4. Serve over tortilla chips and top with a little cheese.



## Try the “Freeze Dance!”

**This silly and easy activity helps get everyone in the family moving. It can be done indoors or outdoors. The most important thing? Have fun!**

- Clear the space so everyone can move around freely and safely.
- Play some music and stop the music at random points. When the music stops, freeze in your pose and hold it until the music begins again. Encourage everyone to move as fast as they can – jumping, bouncing, marching, wiggling – while the music is playing.
- Let everyone take turns picking the music and directing when to start and stop it.



## Get Moving as a Family

According to the recently updated second edition of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, all members of the family, including preschool-age children, experience health benefits from moving more.

- ▶ Find fitness tips and ideas at [food.unl.edu/fitness](https://food.unl.edu/fitness)



# ENGAGE CHILDREN IN LEARNING & PLAY AT HOME



## Read for Resilience

Adults play an important role in helping children understand their feelings after they have experienced a significant change, loss or disaster. Nebraska Extension's Learning Child team has identified books to support children and families during this time of social distancing.

Download free storybook guides with suggested activities and questions to help children connect with the characters' experiences.

▶ Learn more at [child.unl.edu/read4resilience](http://child.unl.edu/read4resilience)



## Try Something New at Home

Looking for fresh ideas to keep young children engaged and learning at home? Check out "A Beautiful Day" — a collaborative online space to share ideas, foster learning and play, and support caregivers. Watch short videos and get inspired to try something new.

▶ Learn more at [cehs.unl.edu/abeautifulday](http://cehs.unl.edu/abeautifulday)

## Build on Your Family's Strengths

When families manage stress in positive, creative ways they increase their resilience. This can be done by working together and celebrating your family's strengths. Use the "What Makes Your Family Strong?" discussion tool to identify your family's unique strengths and areas to grow stronger.

▶ Learn more at [child.unl.edu/family-relationships](http://child.unl.edu/family-relationships)



# GET CONTROL OVER YOUR FINANCES\$



## Make a Spending Plan

Making a spending plan is an effective way to track your income and expenses over a given month. If you experience an income loss, use this plan to compare your spending both before and after your income fell — and see what changes you need to make.

A spending plan helps you:

- Make better decisions about how to spend your money.
  - Provide for needs before wants.
  - Match your spending to your current income.
  - Prevent family arguments over money.
- ▶ Find a simple spending plan form to get started at [go.unl.edu/spending-plan](http://go.unl.edu/spending-plan)

Source: University of Minnesota Extension

## Utilize Farm & Ranch Management Tools

If you are a farmer or rancher, you understand the stress that comes with the job — challenging weather, production risks, volatile markets, debt loads and more. During a crisis, your first financial priority is to review current cash flows and develop a monthly cash flow plan for the coming year.

Resources to help reduce agriculture-related stress:

- ▶ Reach out to Nebraska Strong Financial Service, an independent program that offers producers tools to use existing data to improve decision-making and operational management: [agecon.unl.edu/nsfs](http://agecon.unl.edu/nsfs)
- ▶ Explore various decision tools from Nebraska Extension's Farm and Ranch Management team: [farm.unl.edu/management](http://farm.unl.edu/management)
- ▶ Download a whole farm or ranch monthly cash flow spreadsheet from Iowa State University Extension: [go.unl.edu/cash-flow](http://go.unl.edu/cash-flow)



## Be Prepared for Severe Weather

Even with the pandemic and social distancing, we still need to prepare for severe weather, including the possibility of tornadoes. Nebraska Extension experts have compiled information to prepare yourself, your family and your business for severe weather — and also to help in the recovery process.

▶ Find more severe weather information at [go.unl.edu/severe-weather-covid](http://go.unl.edu/severe-weather-covid)





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Nebraska Extension is dedicated to making a positive impact on the lives of all Nebraskans through life-long learning and outreach education. Extension personnel in communities across Nebraska have expertise and know-how to support nearly every aspect of life. Many are aware of the services Extension provides to Nebraska's agricultural community, but our experts also provide support in many other areas, including nutrition, health, technology, business and entrepreneurship, families and youth, and more.

[extension.unl.edu](https://extension.unl.edu)

## Wellness in Tough Times Team

**Reach out to a team member for information on how you can get involved!**

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