



WASHINGTON HEALTH SYSTEM
Center for Mental Health and Wellbeing

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



Why returning to ‘normal’ feels so not

Take small steps back after pandemic trauma, psychologist says. The pandemic may be easing, but a new set of emotional challenges has only just begun.

One worker got the green light to return to the office but found herself sitting in the parking lot each day, hyperventilating in her car, before summoning the courage to head in. Another questioned whether a normal back-to-school this fall — the moment many parents, if not their kids, have awaited more than a year — might be stressful enough to harm some students’ mental health. A third asked how he might get an appointment with a counselor in an era of soaring demand. The unfortunate answer was that many providers are full. And waitlists are so jammed that some are closing to new patients.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors have long predicted that once the pandemic’s acute phase eased and its physical impacts lessened, there would be mental health fallout. Though the virus continues to rage abroad — the highly contagious Delta variant has triggered new shutdowns in several nations, including Australia, South Africa, and Thailand — the widespread availability of vaccines in the U.S. have meant large swaths of the country can tentatively return to whatever remains of “normal.” And [Karestan Koenen](#), a professor of psychiatric epidemiology at the [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#), has some advice: Go slowly....attempts to return to pre-pandemic routines may feel unsettling.

Working against us, Koenen said, is that many of us are eager to go back to the way things were exactly but will find that impossible. Given the extent of the pandemic’s effects, it’s understandable that the commute will be different, that employers will have new policies in place, and that workers’ home lives — obligations to children, parents, and spouses — will have shifted. All the change, Koenen said, can cause a sense of dislocation.

“Now, after hunkering down, when you go outside that can feel threatening,” Koenen said. “There also can be almost a grief or sadness because things that were normal don’t feel the same ... I think that’s part of the changes we’re all going through right now.” Even before the pandemic any change — even a positive one like getting married or starting a dream job — was known to be a stressor. Add to that the pandemic’s considerable stress, and the next few months will likely be challenging....To read the full article, please visit:

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/07/mental-health-professionals-push-slow-return-post-covid/>

**August
2021**



2021 Mental

Month

National Breastfeeding
Awareness Month

Week

National Health Center
Week (Aug. 9-15)

Day

Friendship Day (Aug. 1)

National Women’s
Equality Day (Aug. 26)

To learn more visit:

<https://sacwellness.com/>

[mental-health-
awareness-calendar/](#)



The toll anxiety can take on athletic performance

DID YOU
KNOW



We all experience anxiety. For example, speaking in front of a group can make us anxious, but that anxiety also motivates us to prepare and practice. Driving in heavy traffic is another common source of anxiety, but it helps keep us alert and cautious to avoid accidents.

However, when feelings of intense fear and distress become overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday activities, an anxiety disorder may be the cause.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. Over 40 million adults in the U.S. (19.1%) have an anxiety disorder. Meanwhile, approximately 7% of children aged 3-17 experience issues with anxiety each year. Most people develop symptoms before age 21.

In a recent article by The Harvard Gazette, Dr. Michael R. Hollander, Harvard Psychologist spoke about the toll anxiety can take on athletic performance...

Simone Biles was flying over a vault at the Tokyo Olympics when she felt the “twisties” — a kind of mental block that disorients gymnasts midair. The four-time American gold medalist stumbled on the landing and promptly left the floor. She soon began to withdraw from team and individual events, citing mental health concerns. “I have to focus on my mental health and not jeopardize my health and well-being,” Biles told reporters. She is not alone.

Earlier this year, tennis star Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open and Wimbledon, citing her struggles with anxiety and depression. Both athletes have been widely praised for speaking up about their efforts to cope with the pressures that come with high-level competition and for foregrounding an issue many have suffered with in silence. The Gazette spoke with Harvard psychologist Michael R. Hollander about the toll anxiety can take on athletic performance and what must change to ensure athletes get the support they need.

GAZETTE: As a psychologist who has worked with high-level athletes, what is your response to Biles’ decision to withdraw from some Olympic events?

HOLLANDER: I think she did absolutely the right thing. These athletes are under so much stress. And while it’s true professional athletes and amateur athletes at this level are always under a lot of stress, the amount of stress and how pervasive it is at an event like the Olympics are just incomparable, and there is really no place they can go to get out of the limelight. You show a picture of Simone Biles in the supermarket and everybody’s going to know who she is. The expectations for her are beyond what we would really reasonably expect for a human being. So, while I appreciate some of the people who’ve been saying stress has always been part of the competition, and I think that’s true, I also think that’s incomplete. It doesn’t really account for the changing nature of social media. She could be on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, all in the same hour. That makes it very difficult for someone like her to say: “I’m just going to do the best I can and I’m not going to worry about all the people who are watching me.” We also have to remember that this is a young person.

To read the full article, please visit: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/07/a-harvard-psychologists-perspective-on-biles-at-the-olympics/>

During times of stress, relief may literally be at the tip of your nose. Intentionally engaging our five senses – hearing, touch, smell, taste, and sight – are incredibly powerful tools in providing instant relief in this hectic world. Plus, they’re free! Are you a visual person? Do you love music? Do what works best for you, and develop an individualized stress relief plan.

Hearing: Sounds have the ability to calm our racing minds and bodies.

Touch: The sensation of touch is often overlooked, but a powerful way to unwind.

Smell: Whether it’s the delicious smell of fresh baked banana bread or the natural aromas of lavender soap, flowers or pine, aromatherapy is a powerful way to relax.

Sight: Certain shades of blue and green are calming and soothing, as they remind us of nature.

Taste: To calm a busy mind, try eating and drinking mindfully.

To read the full article, please visit:
<https://blog.mass.gov/publichealth/mental-wellness/relax-with-the-help-of-your-5-senses/>

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Sincerely,

Jennifer Campbell, MSW, LSW

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National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
Greenbriar Treatment Facility: 1-800-637-4673
STTARS Sexual Assault Hotline (Greene & Washington): 1-888-480-7283