Info-Savvy: Managing Information Overload in Stressful Times

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Today’s Road Map

- Managing information intake
- Anxiety in the presence of information overload
- Practical advice
- Proactive activities for your own information security
Media Time is Increasing

• The average American takes in 12+ hours of digital media per day
  • Not including printed materials
• Up almost 8x the daily info from 1980s
• 60% increase during current pandemic
Information Overload

• Uncertainty fuels anxiety
  • Seeking answers: “Tell me what to do”

• “Law of Diminishing Returns”
  • More is not necessarily better
Anxiety Impacts Thinking

• Cognitive efficiency declines with increased arousal (for difficult tasks)

• Reduced focus
  • Thoughts pulled in many directions

• Decline in processing information
  • Missed conversations and details

• Poorer judgment
  • Panic-buying?

• Stop. Breathe. Think.
Reframing for Stress Management

**Unhelpful Thought**

“This virus is out of control and there’s nothing that I can do!”

“I need to know ALL the latest information. I can’t miss anything or I might be at risk!”

**Alternative Thought**

“I am staying home to keep myself and loved ones safe. I will take this one day at a time.”

“I’ll seek out scientifically-backed information. I’ll reduce the amount of news and social media I take in. I’ll do my best to find reputable sources.”
COVID-19 Research is a Work-in-Progress

Typically, medical research takes years to properly test and report

- Remember: COVID-19 was defined in January 2020
- Research goes through rigorous peer review prior to publication

Much of the COVID-19 data is Preliminary

- Currently, scientists sharing preliminary data allows for other scientists to learn from each other and avoid dead ends
  - Outside of novel situations, this information usually does not reach the public

What we know about the virus is changing daily

- What you read last week may now be out of date
- Be cognitively flexible with new assumptions and findings
Perils of Misinformation

• Consider the source
  • Expert? A friend?
  • A forward from a friend via a stranger’s post on Twitter?
  • Funding sources of the information (i.e., who is benefitting from this story? What might their biases be?)

• Fact Check
  • Does this information sound like a rumor of scientific?
  • Consider fact-checking from multiple sources, or a fact-check website
    • Snopes.com, Factcheck.org
  • Stop to think before you share
Practical Advice

• Limit news about COVID-19 to once per day
  • Schedule a time to catch-up on this information
  • Read the paper in the morning or Watch the evening news
  • Consider a “screen time” app on your phone to monitor time spent

• Quality over Quantity
  • Consider the source to avoid misinformation
  • For virus-related information, go to the experts
    • World Health Organization (WHO)
    • U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC)
More Practical Advice

- Turn off notifications on your phone for media-driven apps

- For better sleep hygiene, avoid reading the news or headlines right before bed

- When talking with friends or family, limit the time spent discussing the virus.
  - Focus the conversation on other topics. Conversation prompts can keep you on track.

- Slow down before you share
A Self-Care Strategy: “STREAM”

- S: Social Connections
- T: Time Out
- R: Relaxation
- E: Exercise and Entertainment
- A: Alternative Thinking
- M: Mindful of Others

*Courtesy of Flinders University, Orama Institute for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Neuroscience: https://www.flinders.edu.au/institute-mental-health-wellbeing-neuroscience/stream
Information Security

• Check your privacy settings on apps and web browsers
  • Helpful tips are available online

• Create Strong Passwords
  • Use phrases
  • Include characters, upper and lower case
  • Avoid personal information

• Change passwords regularly

• AARP offers a helpful article on building better passwords

I don't normally do this but here goes:

- First job - STOP
- Current job - SENDING
- Dream Job - YOUR
- Favorite food - POTENTIAL
- Favorite dog - PASSWORDS
- Favorite footwear - OR
- Favorite Chocolate bar - MEMORABLE
- Favorite Ice Cream - DATA
- Your Vehicle color - TO
- Favorite Holiday - PEOPLE
- Night owl or earlybird - WHO
- Favorite day of the week - COLLECT
- Tattoos - THIS
- Favourite colour - INFORMATION
- Do you like vegetables - FOR
- Do you wear glasses - SOCIAL
- Favourite season - ENGINEERING
Protect Your Passwords

• Password Managers offer a “vault” for your passwords
  • One password unlocks the vault
• Generate secure passwords and save them automatically to your vault
• Examples: LastPass, DashLane, 1Password
Resources and Tutorials

COVID-19 Resources
• World Health Organization
• Center for Disease Control
• WA Department of Health
• UW Medicine

UW Memory and Brain Wellness Center: http://depts.washington.edu/mbwc/

Information Security
• AARP: Internet Safety and Password Security
• How to Choose a Password Manager

Stress Management
• STREAM recommendations
• UCLA Mindfulness
• Sleep Hygiene by Harvard University
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[http://depts.washington.edu/mbwc/events/community-events-programs](http://depts.washington.edu/mbwc/events/community-events-programs)