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Living With COVID-19

Adapting to a New Reality

Harriet Beinfield and Efrem Korngold April 14, 2020
Photos Karuna Greenberg

Our New Reality.

Most of us are struggling to reconcile ourselves with a new reality. Habits and routines are upside down and inside out. Economic instability is rampant. Ordinary coping mechanisms have evaporated as we shelter in place. We're cooped up alone, with family, or friends without the usual breaks. Feelings are raw and some are unfamiliar, like being as out of control as we are. We live as we dream, alone. Yet we're all in this together.

Uncertainty Is Our New Master

Normalcy is interrupted. Millions of us are caught in one giant pause. We're just coming out of the initial adrenalized overdrive and it's dawning on us that we don't know when or how this will end. Uncertainty is our new master.

Some have extraordinary adaptive skills and know how to make lemonade out of lemons. Many are anxious and weary, exhausted by the effort this adaptation demands. Many are facing the grit of survival. Know that this is a hard time, even for those grateful for a home with food in the fridge.

How Are You?

What's hardest for you? Are you learning anything about yourself that might qualify as a silver lining? What worries you? Where do you find comfort?

A Pregnant Pause

Because early adoption and strict compliance show the stay at home order to be working, it makes no sense to stop anytime soon. Whatever comes next, it's unlikely that we will return to what was.

We need a new normal. This event has laid bare how wobbly and poorly organized we are for human good.

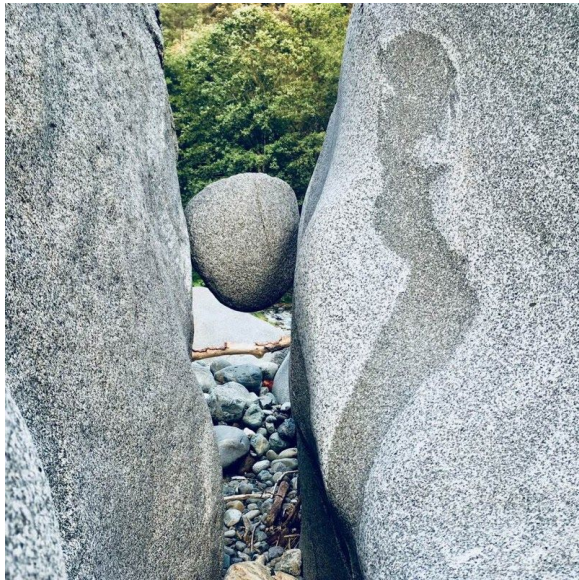
The biosphere is faring better without our normal. What will we give birth to on the other side? It's up for grabs and it's up to us.

What Will Come Next?

Will we mend our relationship to air, water, forest, animals, climate? Can we fiercely tackle income inequality, racial disparities, health access?

Can we reshape our ecological, political, social and economic needs based upon our humanity and interdependence?

It requires enormous courage, creativity and will to reinvent the structures we've put in place that threaten us. Stakes are high. But isn't it in the darkness that we see the stars?



When Will This End?

It won't. The COVID-19 virus isn't going anywhere. It will be with us, and in order to move out of the stay at home order without triggering a tsunami swell, we need two things that have worked for the two countries managing this pandemic the best. South Korea and Germany were prepared, in part due to their experience with SARS. The two things that have worked for them are **testing** and **monitoring**. Testing means the capacity to test everyone in order to include the 25% to 50% without symptoms as well as those with symptoms. Monitoring means mapping, contact tracing (everyone that person has had contact with in the last 2 weeks) and watching them. There's no way to know exactly when this might happen.

Vaccinations are problematic because by the time they're tested, the virus mutates. Experiments with medicines to treat the disease are underway but none have been proven. It is not yet known whether the adverse effects outweigh a possible benefit. There's a lot that requires us to continue to stay at home and wait. If we don't, we will be right back where we started. Eventually we will learn how to co-exist with COVID-19.

'When Will It End?' Is The Wrong Question

Infectious Disease Specialist Michael Saag became sick with COVID-19 and there's a link to his story below. He says, "When can we go back to life as we know it?" is the wrong question.

"The correct one is not when, but **HOW** do we stop the stay-at-home? Whether we stop it in July or March, nothing has changed...except that you slowed transmission. Transmission itself hasn't changed. The virus isn't different, nor is anyone's

susceptibility different on July 1 than it was on March 1. We need to spend the next two to two and a half months preparing for the release of the stay-at-home restrictions and start aggressive case contact tracing, just like we do with tuberculosis, where a new case is identified and quickly a team comes in, tests that individual, gets them into care, gets them isolated. And then we do tracing of every individual that has come into contact with them in the last two weeks. And then those individuals, depending on how their tests go, will either get into care if they're positive or be quarantined for another 14 days. That's what we have to do. If we just release folks back into the community and do what we were doing in February, why would it be any different?"

Radio interview: [COVID-19 Survivor Who's Also An Epidemiologist Reflects On His Illness 'Everything Broke Loose': A Doctor And COVID-19 Survivor Recalls His Ordeal?](#)
[Opinion | What an infectious disease specialist learned about the virus – from getting it](#)

[How Will We Know When It's Time to Reopen the Nation?](#)

Spectrum of COVID-19 Symptoms

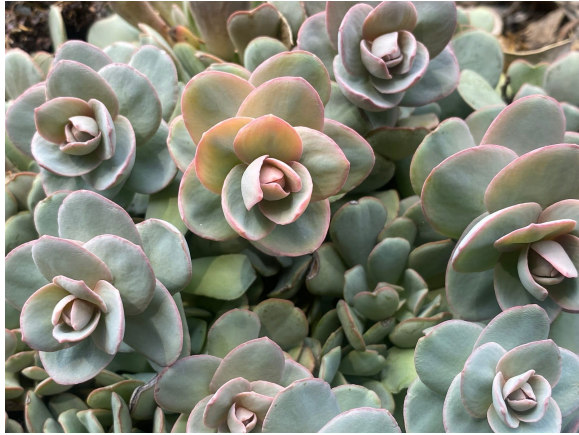
Symptoms range from:

- Being infected with NO SYMPTOMS as *silent spreaders*.
- Mild digestive upsets, feeling out of sorts.
- Fever, chills, body aches, respiratory symptoms (cough, loss of smell, taste and appetite, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath), nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, night sweats.
- Pneumonia (inflammation of the air sacs of the lungs), difficulty breathing, cough, chest pain, fever, weakness, with variable severity. It's possible to recover from this, and it's possible that hospitalization is needed for help with breathing.
- Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) is widespread inflammation of the lungs characterized by rapid breathing, shortness of breath, bluish lips, tightness or pain in the chest, low blood oxygen levels, muscle fatigue, weakness, low blood pressure, dry, hacking cough and fever. A blood oxygen monitor let's you know your oxygen saturation level. Hospitalization may be needed.
- Symptom Score App: <https://www.screenCOVID.org/>

Timing of COVID-19

When people need to be hospitalized tends to be between 9 -13 days after symptoms. People with mild symptoms can recover within one to two weeks, those with more severe illness may need five weeks or more to recover. Of those with symptoms, 80% recover at home on their own.

People are most contagious 2-3 days before they show symptoms, if they show symptoms at all. Symptoms appear between 2-14 days after becoming infected, often around day 4-5. But 25%-50% of those infected have NO SYMPTOMS. Because they don't realize they're infected, they are spreaders without knowing it. That's why the same stay at home rules apply to everyone.



How do people spread the virus?

The virus is spread when people share the same space and the microscopic droplets from an infected person enter your eyes, nose or mouth. This can happen during a conversation, when people are breathing the same air in a contained space, at the grocery store check-out counter, eating together or expelling breath when speaking, singing, running or standing close together. Since droplets can travel 26 feet, 6 ft of distance is not enough. [Micro droplets suspending in air on Vimeo](#)

These tiny droplets can land on surfaces, and if someone touches that surface (doorknobs, shopping carts, touchpads, countertops, toilet levers), they can transfer to your eyes, nose or mouth when you touch your face. Being exposed to a strong viral dose can affect the severity of the disease. Generally, transmission of droplets in the air from an infected person directly into your eyes, nose or mouth is a stronger dose (think parts per million of exposure) than a relatively weaker dose on a surface. Frequent hand washing kills the virus. To be safe, not being around other people is best. Wear a mask and gloves in public.

Who is at greatest risk?

Nearly 90% of those hospitalized have a chronic underlying medical condition like hypertension, obesity, chronic lung disease (i.e., asthma, COPD), diabetes, cardiovascular or kidney or liver disease, pregnancy, smoking. They are 2x-3x at greater risk in all age groups over age 18. About 4% of those who are infected are hospitalized. Age is not as significant as chronic underlying conditions, although those over 65 have more of many of the underlying conditions. [Hospitalization Rates and Characteristics of Patients Hospitalized with Laboratory-Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 – COVID-NET, 14 States, March 1–30, 2020 | MMWR](#)

What should I do if I have a moderate case?

Sleep. Drink fluids to hydrate. The virus makes a sticky glue on the inside of the air sacs in the lungs that transfer oxygen to the blood. The thicker it gets, the harder it is to breathe. Drinking water may dilute the stickiness. Will matters. Nourish your body with broths to maintain strength and balance electrolytes. Your body aches. Get up and walk around even if you don't feel like it. Moving inhibits the stagnation of fluid in the lungs. See if sleeping propped up helps. Breathe deeply. Hold your breath to expand your chest. It's not going to feel easy but do it anyway. Stretch your torso by putting your arms up in the air. Turn to lie on your belly to relieve pressure on the back of your lungs where the virus settles. Fevers can recede and then spike for days, often worse at night. With [questions surrounding ibuprofen](#) and other NSAIDS like Motrin and Advil, some doctors say avoid all of them and use Tylenol instead. Visualize your desired outcome. Use a waterfall of light to imagine flushing out the virus. Imagine infusing your body with strength.

Chris Cuomo, CNN anchor, had COVID-19 and said that when his fever started to go down, he felt the illness moving into his chest. He stressed that getting up and moving around is crucial, saying, "the beast comes out at night....When the fever spikes, you want to curl up in a ball and stay there for the next 6-7 hours, and you can't. You've got to bundle up, start drowning yourself in fluids, take Tylenol, and get after it. If you don't want it to get into your lungs, you've got to force yourself to breathe. You've got to get up off your ass, you got to walk around. It hurts, you don't want to do it, everything in your body is telling you not to do it... The more I push myself to do, the better I'm getting...It's not a cakewalk, but we can get through this." [Chris Cuomo opens up about his fight against Covid-19](#)



Arundhati Roy: The Pandemic is a Portal

“Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to *normality*, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

Message from Hopi White Eagle 3.16.20

“This moment humanity is going through can be seen as a portal and as a hole. The decision to fall into the hole or go through the portal is up to you. ...Nervous all the time, with pessimism, they will fall into the hole. But if you take this opportunity to look at yourself, rethink life and death, take care of yourself and others, you will cross the portal. Take care of your home, take care of your body.

Do not lose the spiritual dimension of this crisis, have the aspect of the eagle, which from above, sees the whole... There is a social demand in this crisis, but there is also a spiritual demand. The two go hand in hand. Without the social dimension, we fall into fanaticism. But without the spiritual dimension, we fall into pessimism and lack of meaning. You were prepared to go through this crisis...Learn about resistance with indigenous and African peoples: we have been and continue to be exterminated. But we still haven't stopped singing, dancing, lighting a fire and having fun.

Don't feel guilty about being happy during this difficult time. You don't help by being sad and without energy. It helps if good things emanate from the Universe now. It is through joy that one resists.,,When the storm passes, you will be very important in the reconstruction of this new world. You need to be well and strong...In shamanism, there is a rite of passage called the quest for vision. You spend a few days alone in the forest, without water, without food, without protection. When you go through this portal, you get a new vision of the world, because you have faced your fears, your difficulties...This is what is asked of you.

What world do you want to build for yourself? For now, this is what you can do: serenity in the storm. Calm down and pray. Everyday. Establish a routine to meet the sacred every day. Good things emanate, what you emanate now is the most important thing. And sing, dance, resist through art, joy, faith and love.”

Practical Tips from an Ohlone UCSF MD

[One Covid-19 Doctor's Personal Wellness To-Do List](#)



Pink Moon - The Pond by Mary Oliver

You think it will never happen again.
Then, one night in April,
the tribes wake trilling.
You walk down to the shore.
Your coming stills them,
but little by little the silence lifts
until song is everywhere
and your soul rises from your bones
and strides out over the water.
It is a crazy thing to do -
for no one can live like that,
floating around in the darkness
over the gauzy water.
Left on the shore your bones
keep shouting come back!
But your soul won't listen;
in the distance it is sparkling
like hot wires. So,
like a good friend,
you decide to follow.
You step off the shore
and plummet to your knees -
you slog forward to your thighs
and sink to your cheekbones -
and now you are caught
by the cold chains of the water -

you are vanishing while around you
the frogs continue to sing, driving
their music upward through your own throat,
not even noticing
you are someone else.
And that's when it happens -
you see everything
through their eyes,
their joy, their necessity;
you wear their webbed fingers;
your throat swells.
And that's when you know
you will live whether you will or not,
one way or another,
because everything is everything else,
one long muscle.
It's no more mysterious than that.
So you relax, you don't fight it anymore,
the darkness coming down
called water,
called spring,
called the green leaf, called
a woman's body
as it turns into mud and leaves,
as it betas in its cage of water,
as it turns like a lonely spindle
in the moonlight, as it says
yes.