

# Telecommuting with the Tiger King: Cultivating Wellness in the Time of COVID-19

By Karen DeMeola

**P****TSD RELATED ANXIETY** requires me to be in a constant state of vigilance, waiting for the other shoe to drop, and always planning for the figurative or literal parade of horrors. I am a half-hearted prepper; I have bins of supplies, but not a single non-perishable food item or bottle of water. I am not dedicated enough to homestead but have a potbelly pig and am restocking our chicken coop. I thought I would be ready for an apocalypse, but nothing quite prepared me for COVID-19.

The difficulties of telecommuting are not just about finding the right location but also about the distraction and the reminders of what you need, lack, and want. That tape dispenser I never use—I needed that. The plants I neglected to take home have likely already perished. And all my work people—with whom I spend more time than I do my spouse—were no longer surrounding me on a daily basis. Everything changed overnight, and I quickly went into crisis mode; which for me means ignoring my own needs while I make sure everyone else is okay. I work long hours, eat odd things at odd times, drink a lot of caffeine, and sleep fitfully. I forget everything other than the crisis. I found myself documenting the daily counts from the state COVID-19 page, doing my own comparison, reading everything on the CDC site, obsessing about the varied models outlining how long the outbreak would last and how many would die. Then obsessed about dying. I was fine until I wasn't. The Life Straws, canteens, plastic sheeting, Purell, soap, tents, hammocks, and duct tape are nice to look at but didn't help with the anxiety, fear, and isolation.



## Recognition



I quickly realized that I needed to take a breath (which I did obsessively to ensure that I didn't have fibroids in my lungs like some random Instagram post instructed) and a break. I reminded myself I needed to practice what I preach: mindfulness, wellness, and self-care. I am the worst at taking care of myself and needed help. Thankfully my wife is also home for the

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next seven weeks and is grounded in the practice of yoga, meditation, and intention.

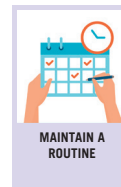
## Finding Your Zen



Days of WebEx meetings are challenging. I added Microsoft Analytics to my routine, which blocks off “focus time” at random intervals each day and reminds me to stand up, focus on e-mail, or do anything but a video

or phone conference. That wasn’t quite enough so I added a lunch break, found online gentle yoga sessions I could use after work, and took evening walks to the Willimantic River, which sits behind our home. We worked in the yard, played with the dog, hung our hammocks, and moved the chicken coop. My mind is clear when I am working in the yard. Our walks are mostly spent with me rambling about the million things I need to do—until we reach the water when I am finally blissfully quiet. Yoga is much harder as it requires focus, which is difficult to give at this time.

## Finding Normalcy in the Abnormal



Every Sunday we go to Toast Four Corners for brunch. There is nothing like having a local that knows that you like cinnamon swirl French toast, bacon, and a Godiva chocolate-filled cup of coffee. We miss our routine and decided to create our own Sunday brunch. It is certainly different, but creating the brunch vibe at our

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kitchen table is delightful—and we don't close. Treating ourselves in our own home no longer feels like work. I don't know if we will continue this as we miss our friends and familiar faces from our community.

## Stay Connected and Have Fun



The best part of my week is the Friday afternoon recap I scheduled for all staff. I get to see everyone in their natural habitat: laundry piles, unique wallpaper, amazing art, screaming kids, barking dogs, and all kinds of hair. We are all more authentic and connect so easily in that once a week call. The challenges of working remotely fade away each Friday.

Connecting with friends and family via Zoom or Facetime just to check in, reminisce about UConn's March Madness history and what could have been this year, or to share a cup of coffee or a cocktail. Online book groups, board games, trivia games, and scavenger hunts are amazing ways to connect with people outside your family and work life.

## Resources

**Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers:** [lclcf.org](http://lclcf.org)

**ABA COVID-19 Mental Health Resources:** [americanbar.org/groups/lawyer\\_assistance/resources/covid-19--mental-health-resources](http://americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/covid-19--mental-health-resources)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

**The New York Times Crossword puzzle:** [nytimes.com/crosswords](http://nytimes.com/crosswords)  
Free to print or play online

**Calm:** [calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath](http://calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath)  
This link provides free resources through Calm.com

**Netflix.com**

**Hoopla and Overdrive:** Apps that allow you to connect your library card and access online books for free

It is hard to imagine having fun in a pandemic. But I found fun in Netflix's *Tiger King*. It is eye-opening, ridiculous, amazingly entertaining, unbelievable, and will be seared into my brain for all eternity. I have connected with more people over *Tiger King* than any other topic during this pandemic.

## Be Well

It is difficult to stay well in periods of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and isolation. It can be a challenge for some to get out of bed and face the day. It is not easy to transition to remote work, homeschooling children, online learning, and online

grocery shopping. Reach out for help if you need it, and be good to yourself and others. Connect with someone you know is without family or struggling in other ways. Sometimes that one connection can be a lifeline to the outside world. And, as my therapist reminds me, in the uncertainty, it is not about having the answers it is about being present. ■

Be well.  
Karen

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