

# COVID-19 AND INTERNSHIPS

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## LOOKING FOR AN INTERNSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC? HERE'S HOW TO KEEP STRESS AT BAY

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Looking for an internship opportunity or co-op term can be stressful at the best of times. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, different sources of stress are piling up. Some students are worried about their internship prospects. Others are finding it hard to adjust to distance education, isolation and a lack of personal space. And, of course, many are concerned that they or their family members might get seriously ill.

While these responses are perfectly normal, they can affect your physical and mental wellbeing. The first step to managing stress is to understand it. Once you've got it under control, you'll be better able to focus on looking for an internship position or job. **The Centre for Studies on Human Stress** ([www.humanstress.ca](http://www.humanstress.ca)), directed by neuroscience researcher Sonia Lupien, provides some interesting insights about stress.

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## WHAT IS STRESS?

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### **Stress is a biological response to a threat:**

Humans developed this response to defend themselves from threats in their environment (known as *stressors*). When we're stressed, we release adrenaline and cortisol, two hormones that make us more alert and help us react quickly.

### **4 common elements of stressful situations**

A situation is stressful if it has one or several of the following characteristics: it's novel, it's unpredictable, there's a threat to your ego or the situation is not in your control. It's no wonder that the current pandemic is so stressful. The situation is unprecedented, relatively unpredictable and you don't have much control over how it will unfold.

### **Optimal stress levels**

Like other biological functions, there is an optimal level of stress. When your stress response is too low, you run the risk of underestimating the threat (e.g., you might not wash your hands after going to the grocery store). But if your stress is too high, it can paralyze you (e.g., impede decision making) or trigger panic (e.g., make poor decisions, like buying 560 rolls of toilet paper).

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## WHY AM I SO STRESSED WHILE MY FRIENDS AREN'T?

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### **Everyone responds to stress differently.**

Stress levels depend on your personal sensitivity, which can be generalized or specific to certain types of stressors, as well as the strategies you've learned to cope with stress.

### **Absolute vs. relative stressors.**

Researchers distinguish between two types of stressors: absolute and relative. Absolute stressors are objective and universal. They include natural disasters, accidents, pandemics, etc. In contrast, relative stressors are subjective and depend on personal interpretation and context. These include being stuck in traffic, facing criticism, starting a new job, etc.

## WHAT STRESS-MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES WORK?

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### **Find activities that you find calming.**

Some people de-stress by taking a walk, listening to music or colouring mandalas. But these strategies don't work for everyone. You might prefer gardening, washing dishes or doing 100 push-ups. Or maybe you're the type who enjoys watching soothing videos of people popping bubble wrap or rotating Chinese baoding balls in their hand. Do whatever works for you!

### **Learn to cope.**

Adapting can be hard, but it will help you deal with whatever comes up. It will make you more resilient. Here are a few ideas on how to develop coping strategies:

1. Take a step back to assess a situation objectively before making decisions.
2. Communicate and connect with others. That way you'll feel less alone in the situation.
3. Regain control over the things in your power and create an action plan for yourself.
4. Accept that you can't control everything in your environment and that some things simply aren't the way they were before.

*The Internships & Jobs team is still available to serve you by phone or email. To schedule a one-on-one appointment with a career counsellor, write to: [stages.emplois@polymtl.ca](mailto:stages.emplois@polymtl.ca)*

## RESOURCES

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Stress, anxiety and depression associated with COVID-19

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/stress-anxiety-and-depression-associated-with-the-coronavirus-covid-19-disease/>