

Dr. George Rapier is the founder, chairman and CEO of WellMed Medical Management, Inc.



Fellow Americans,

We find ourselves in very difficult times. I have been a practicing doctor for 40 years, and my job has always been to try to help people I touch to lead better lives. I would ask each of you, in these troubling and uncertain times, to do the same for your fellow humans. Say and do whatever you can with as much love and care as possible.

If you are feeling stressed and anxious as you shelter in place, take comfort knowing that you are not alone, and that you can manage your stress. You may be juggling working from home and helping your kids study at home, too. You may be struggling to make ends meet because you suddenly are unable to work.

Acute stress triggers the body's fight, flight or freeze response which can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diabetes and depression. In addition, some of us deal with stress in ways that are not good for us. According to market research firm Nielsen, alcohol sales across the country surged 55 percent the week of March 21.

I asked my friend, nationally known psychotherapist Dr. Jaime Huysman, co-author of the best-selling "Take Your Oxygen First," to explain the benefits of deep breathing techniques that I use to help overcome stress.

"Have you ever gotten so overwhelmed and stressed-out that you realize you're forgetting to breathe? This is a natural response to stress," Dr. Huysman said. "But when our breathing becomes shallow, we're laying out a welcome mat for panic and anxiety to come right on in! Anyone who has experienced attacks of panic or anxiety knows how debilitating they can be."

There are preventive methods we can take to minimize the effects of stress, anxiety, and panic. Dr. Jamie has personally found success with integrative medicine expert Dr. Andrew Weil's 4-7-8 breathing exercise:

- 4** - Breathe in deeply through your nose for 4 seconds
- 7** - Hold it if you can for 7 seconds
- 8** - Exhale from your mouth with energy for 8 seconds

Repeat anywhere from three to five times. Do this whenever you feel stress.

Dr. Weil, who teaches this breathing exercise, calls it a "natural tranquilizer for the nervous system." I can affirm that it helps put me in a relaxed state, and to be more focused. Dr. Huysman has been teaching this technique to doctors, nurses and staff at WellMed, many of whom are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To see a video of Dr. Weil demonstrating the breathing exercise, go to YouTube and search for "Dr. Weil 4 7 8" or visit www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/.

Embracing structured breathing is a healthy, proven ways to help us better manage stress during these uncertain times. If we actively manage our stress, we will be better prepared for what is in front of us today, so we can deal with whatever challenges or opportunities come tomorrow. I encourage you to take time every day to breathe, and share this with your loved ones.

One last thing: If you miss live music, check out the WellMed Facebook page or YouTube page at 2 p.m. Central Time / 3 p.m. Eastern Time the next few Wednesdays for WellMed Wednesdays LIVE! We're proud to sponsor this virtual concert series featuring Texas music legend Flaco Jimenez (April 22), Tejano star Raulito Navaira (April 29) and Commodores co-founder Thomas McClary (May 6).

Just search "WellMed" on Facebook or YouTube. We'll see you at the show.

