

WELLNESS

in the

WORRY

When life gets turned upside down,
try these tips to find balance and peace. **- By Jessica Mozo**

If you've been feeling more anxious than usual in recent months, you're not alone. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a spike in anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns for people across the globe. Physical distancing has made life especially challenging for teens who enjoy social interactions with friends at school, sports and organizations such as FFA.

Without a doubt, school and extracurricular activities look different for FFA members now than they did one year ago. Some students are attending school in person, while others are learning virtually from home.

"Teens are already dealing with the normal stressors they feel related to social relationships, academics and family life, and now they have added Zoom fatigue and an increase

in time being spent on electronics and computers," says Janelle Stewart, co-author of a Michigan State University Extension report called "Youth Farm Stress."

Virtual learning alone is a stressor because students have to adapt to a whole new process of learning, submitting assignments and taking tests.

"Most students are used to being face-to-face and having social connections with their peers and teachers, so virtual learning has been very challenging," says Kea Norrell-Aitch, co-author of the report. "We also hear a lot of students say how stressful test-taking is, including exams and standardized tests. Preparing for the SAT and ACT takes academic stress to another level because those tests determine their future and often dictate their next step after graduation,



such as which college they'll attend."

Experts say one of the best things you can do to manage anxiety is create your own self-care plan.

"While many teens have a sense of when they are feeling overwhelmed, anxious or depressed, they don't always know what to do about it," Norrell-Aitch says. "A self-care plan is something you can act upon whenever you feel stressed or saddened about things going on in your household, community or nation. Think of ways to improve your social, emotional and physical well-being. Your plan should definitely include getting proper nutrition by eating balanced meals,

getting outside and connecting with nature, and getting adequate sleep – at least eight hours each night."

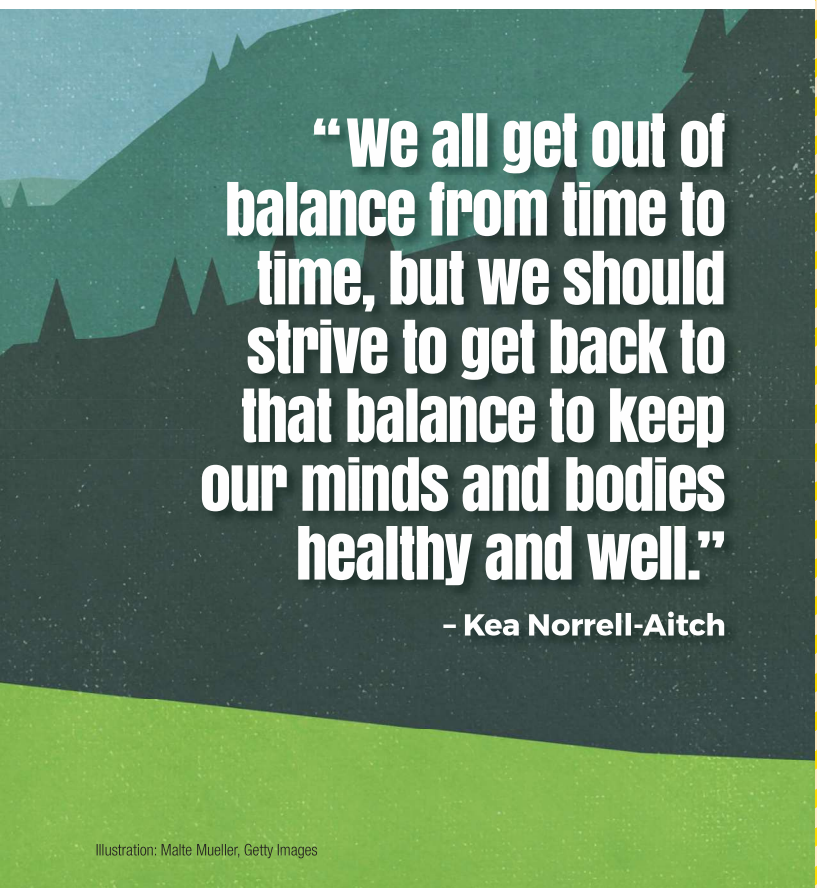
Remember that your self-care plan may look different than your best friend's plan.

"It's an individualized plan," Stewart says. "Riding my bike may be a stress reliever for me, but not for you. It's very much about what helps you."

Include a variety of things in your plan, and remember that doing everything in moderation is important.

"We all get out of balance from time to time," Norrell-Aitch says, "but we should strive to get back to that balance to keep our minds and bodies healthy and well."

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An illustration of a forest scene with dark green trees and a lighter green hill in the foreground. A quote is overlaid in white text.

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– Kea Norrell-Aitch

8 Ideas for Self-care

In addition to eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep and spending time outdoors, consider including these ideas in your self-care plan.

- 1. Identify and talk with an adult you trust, whether it's a parent, coach, teacher, neighbor or FFA advisor. Studies show having a caring adult in your life is proven to reduce suicidal tendencies among teens.**
- 2. Avoid caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant, and the jittery effects it has on your body can provoke anxiety.**
- 3. Do something kind for someone or take part in a community service project.**
- 4. Cook a meal with your family or engage in another fun family activity.**
- 5. Go to the theater, an art gallery or other creative venues.**
- 6. Focus on positive talk. Negative talk creates a downward spiral, while positive talk can lift your mood.**
- 7. Limit your time on social media. Ask yourself if social media is contributing to your stress level. If the answer is yes, take a break from it.**
- 8. Get outdoors and take a hike. Physical activity has been proven to reduce stress and improve your ability to sleep.**