



# How to heal through COVID-19

Savvy Self-Care Using  
Calmness, Openness, Vigilance,  
Intelligence, and Dedication

By Heath and Nicole Reed



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new information about COVID-19 emerges, we are swimming through an accelerated climate of fight-or-flight and crisis consciousness. A lot has changed in just a few weeks and even days. We see a hoarding and scarcity mind-set driving the rush to fight, to find, and to stock up on essentials like toilet paper. Juxtaposed by the health imperative for extreme, never-seen-before social distancing, millions like us who are in the service industry suddenly find ourselves without work or a means to pay for said stockpile of essentials.

Worry, nervousness, and fear are common companions regarding finances, at-risk family members, rising death tolls, and the not-knowing when—and if—things will ever go back to “normal.” Though normalcy has been morphing for sometime, longstanding structures like social connecting, political civility, and the tradition of strenuous fact-checking of news outlets points to a new-norm trajectory.

In this historic period of crumbling structures, we also feel the burgeoning opportunity to reimagine and re-contextualize the recent state of events in ways that lead to new and supportive structures emphasizing safety and connection. Entertaining a new lens of possibility helps us grow into a brand-new vision of what could be, and we invite you to dream big and practice along with us.

With reimagination in mind, we are recommitting to our personal health and well-being through simple, easy, and, yes, fun self-care techniques. In this way, we not only invest in enhancing our own wellness but also create the requisite momentum we will need to rely on when it is time again to press the flesh. We are reframing this unusual time through the lens of what we call “Healing through COVID-19,” using calmness, openness, vigilance, intelligence, and dedication. Following are practical strategies for enhancing community safety and connection. We beseech you to be the change you wish to see in the world by practicing intentional acts of kindness—toward yourself and others.

## Calm Your Mind

In this uncertain time, one of the most powerful, stress-reducing, and altruistic acts you can perform is to *calm your mind*. When you are intoxicated by fear, you become less available to access all the resources that may be available to you, and you are much less open to others around you. Locked in a personal or collective fear trance, the stress hormone cortisol and adrenaline (the correspondingly most addictive hormone the body produces) are activated, and the nervous system decommissions the more sophisticated neo-cortex in favor of the fight-or-flight imperatives of the reptilian, survival-at-any-cost brain. Alternatively, practices that calm the nervous system enhance vagal tone, and allow access to the full potential of higher thinking, emotional intelligence, and “social response-agility.”

Grow your reservoir of mindful relaxation techniques and participate in behaviors that enhance feelings of collective safety. Conscious breathing, meandering walks, meditation, exercise, qigong, yoga, smiling, journaling, dancing, etc. are all potent catalysts to personal and interpersonal immune system enhancement. Another potent way to shift your biology and psychology is with the “Calm Me Down” meditation (see page 29).

## Openness

Dr. Bruce Lipton, biologist and pioneer in epigenetics, says that all our cells—whether a brain, blood, or bone cell—are wired for one of two functions: they are either growing or they are guarding. This is also true when we are amidst a crisis. In the face of panic or uncertainty, our primitive default position takes a shelter-in-place imperative where we close down and redouble our efforts to guard against, defend, and protect ourselves.

Another choice also exists. What if we choose to open our minds to the possibility of using our uncomfortable, unsettling, and scary experiences as an opportunity to grow, learn, and discover? Trying to grow and guard at the same time is akin to stepping on the gas and brake pedals simultaneously. We go nowhere fast! We believe the most important feature of being resourceful and happy depends on our openness to discovery—and our ability to get curious.

## Vigilance

When Heath was growing up, his dad would tell him, “The mind is like a parachute. It only works if it’s open.” Then, he would add, “But you want to be sure that your mind isn’t so open that your brains spill out.”

The quality of vigilance helps balance openness with carefulness. Vigilance is defined as “keeping careful watch.” And we experience vigilance as an opportunity to ask, “How we can be more care “full” or full of care?” There are many lenses of perception we can view things through. How are you watching what is happening? What are the careful actions you are taking to protect you, your family, and your community?

In the yin and yang of things, it is advisable to be cautious about extremes. Extreme hypervigilance can tailspin into sleepless nights, overconsumption, and panic. Extreme apathy can lead to avoidance, checking out, and depression.

How can you place watchful eyes on unfolding circumstances? What is happening in ways that are full of care? I give care to washing my hands, sanitizing my space. I am vigilant about taking care of my health and protecting the health of the most vulnerable by pausing my practice, staying home, and regularly checking in with the ones I love.

## Intelligence

In this frenzy of uncertainty, it is now even more imperative to rely on the most reputable sources of information, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and your state’s health department. Be aware that fraud and misinformation have already arrived in the form of false cures, ineffective or harmful preventive measures, and other inaccurate and unsafe claims. Be mindful that many social media platforms do not fact-check for accuracy in as stringent a way as other news outlets. Be smart about who, what, and where you invest your focus.

Not only does intelligence take the form of IQ, but full spectrum intelligence includes tuning into our emotional intelligence (EQ) and our body wisdom. To stem the tide of our global hypervigilance on one hand, or Pollyanna ignorance on the other, now is a ripe time to get curious about—and regularly share—how you and your people



## Calm Me Down Meditation

Based on Taoist qigong, sometimes referred to as the Circulation of Light or the Microcosmic Orbit, this meditation combines visualization, affirmation, and subtle muscular contraction. To practice this technique:

- Ask your body how you want to practice this meditation (sitting, standing, or lying down).
- Get comfortable.
- Enjoy a few deep clearing breaths, as you begin to establish your awareness in the present moment.
- Visualize a glowing orb of light at the base of your pelvis.
- Imagine different colors until you find a color that resonates with you.
- With your next in-breath, visualize inhaling this light from your tailbone up your spine all the way to your brain.
- As you exhale, imagine and feel this light cascading down your brain and spine until it returns to the pelvic floor.
- Repeat until you feel comfortable linking your breath, attention, and visualization.

Now let's add some more layers. Begin again with your colorful light at the base of your spine, and then:

- Inhale up as you inwardly say the word "calm."
- As you exhale (and visualize the light flowing down your brain to your tailbone) affirm the word "down."
- Repeat several times.

One additional variation:

- Inhale up with the word "calm," and then hold your breath at the top.
- As you hold your breath, lift up your pelvic floor muscles (engage your perineum), and say the word "me."
- Exhale as you release the pelvic floor lift, and repeat the word "down" as you see the light descend.

Repeat any of these variations for at least nine repetitions or three minutes, and you will immediately feel your mind and body soften into a relaxed and calm state of being.

## Expand and Contract Activities

Embody the feeling of growing and the experience of guarding with this simple act:

- Look at your hand.
- Now watch and feel your hand open and close.
- Squeeze your hand shut, and then throw it open.
- Make a clenching fist, and then slowly unfurl each finger.
- Do this several times while playing with speed and intensity.
- Now get curious, and notice what feels familiar about this movement.
- Consider what feels comfortable. What does this activity remind you of? Notice what happens to your breath.
- Now, add the sound of wonder, "Hmm?"

If you like, let your whole body get involved.

- Contract and expand your spine.
- Open and close your mouth.
- Move toward and away from something.

Continue to fill the space with questions and answers, but favor the questions. We don't always have or need the answers. But, by getting curious about what we want to learn and discover, we can reframe a crisis as an opportunity to grow.



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## Space Clearing

Take time to clean and clear the space you live and work in, but also take time to clean and clear your internal, energetic space. The following affirmation is one we use after a session when we're communicating with someone who is going through intense feelings (or when feeling awash in the empathic resonance of this global pandemic). Speak the following aloud several times or until you feel energetically clear: "Any energy that does not belong to me, go back to your source . . . and block." Then, take a deep breath in—and with conviction—say, "NOW!"

are feeling. This is an emotional time, and emotions become enlivened when we openly and honestly share how we feel in a nonjudgmental environment. When you name it, you can tame it. Feelings are a sign of flow and freedom, so keep the emotional gates open so you don't kink yourself up or close yourself off.

## Check Your Emotions

One way to activate the full spectrum of intelligence is to ground oneself in the moment by speaking unarguably. Emotions may be messy, and physical sensations might be confusing, but feelings are a barometer of the present-moment truth.

When we wish for things to be different, we are resisting reality, and we begin to defend our limitations. When we practice ways to befriend, align, and accurately feel what is truly happening, we create inner and outer harmony, connection, and clarity. The following exercise helps us speak unarguably and align with the here and now—even through the uneven waves of our experience.

- Bring both hands to your heart and connect with your heart space (helloheart!).
- Feel your heartbeat.
- Connect with the sensation of the rise and fall of your breath.
- Now say aloud, "Today is \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the name of the week] and I feel \_\_\_\_\_ [describe a body sensation or feeling]."
- Begin to practice speaking unarguably. Lead with your truth. What is today? How do I feel? How is my body responding? What else do I notice?
- Repeat several times until you notice a shift in your feeling and understanding.

Avoid adding any explanation or story to the moment. Push the pause button on drama and explanation, and instead allow the expression of your truth to anchor you in the moment. With practice, you can begin to connect the obvious truth of the day of the week with the unpredictable nature of your emotions, and feel more at ease and share more accurately in the world around us. Instead of overriding, justifying, or resisting emotions, begin to accept them and co-opt the energy of your feelings in service of your next step.

## Dedication

We don't know all we need to know about COVID-19, but all indications appear that it is going to be influencing our economy, social relationships, and health-care system for quite a while. Here we have an open space to dedicate ourselves to be in alignment with what matters most to us. What are your core values, life purpose, or soul mission? And would you be willing to dedicate yourself to experiencing and expressing more of what you hold near and dear to your heart? We are committed to embodying loving kindness, and in the context of savvy self-care, we are advocating our community of friends, family, clients, and neighbors to dedicate themselves to practices that grow exquisite self-care.

Combined studies show that it takes at least 40–66 days to forge a new habit, so as you consider dedicating your life to something you deem worthwhile, be generous, patient, and kind to yourself. Just because intention is clear, new habits may not “stick” the first time—or every time. Diligent dedication is a requisite ingredient to creating what you want.

Likewise, release the notion that you're going to always feel a certain way and be in congruence with your intention. As much as you'd love to align your values of loving kindness with your life, none of us are ever going to continuously be loving and kind. We are human after all, and people or circumstances push our buttons, or we go unconscious, or we simply go to sleep. We recommend against buying into the unrealistic myth of trying to get it right the first time or every time. As you zero in on what you'd like to dedicate yourself to in the near future, consider this formula: Commit + Recommit - Criticism = New Conscious Habit.

## New Conscious Habit

Said another way, your first step is choosing an intention to commit to, and your second step is going unconscious and forgetting your intention. (Luckily, you don't even have to remember to forget!) Third is recommitting to your intention without adding any criticism, blame, or complaint. Not beating yourself up when you make a mistake is often a challenge, but we know that learning outcomes don't improve when we use punishment (like criticism). Magic happens when we simply recommit. This likely will require several thousand repetitions until your new commitment becomes a new habit.

To help ripen your new commitments, write them down on Post-It notes, and place them around the house, on your computer monitor, car dashboard, on your digital calendar to remind yourself every day (or hour) to recommit without criticism. What new habit would you like to explore, enjoy, and grow mastery in as you co-create a new normal?

Unmitigated stress is harmful to the immune system, and some of the most effective ways we and our community can enhance health is to commit to behaviors that activate calmness, openness, vigilance, intelligence, and dedication. The atmosphere is ripe to reimagine and create new habits that support an environment for our highest self to shine through. Fear is inevitable and fear is contagious. But *kindness, generosity, and listening for how we connect* are also contagious acts! You can make a new commitment any time. You can be a source of leadership in your community by consciously creating habits that support your beliefs, ideals, and a world you want to be in. We are all in this together.

We want to leave you with inspiration from Chief Seattle, “Man does not weave this web of life. She is merely a strand of it. Whatever she does to the web she does to herself.” Let's band together and be that bright light that sparks the expansion of feeling more connected, loving, and safe **m&b**

**G** Heath and Nicole Reed are co-founders of Living Metta (living “loving kindness”) and want everyone in the world to enjoy the experience of befriending their body. The Reeds lead workshops and retreats across the country and overseas, including Thailand, France, Hawaii, and Mexico, and have been team-teaching touch and movement therapy for over 20 years. In addition to live classes, the Reeds offer massage therapy and self-care videos, DVDs, and online trainings, which may be found at [www.livingmetta.com](http://www.livingmetta.com).