



MMI
PODCAST
EPISODE 2

Mental Health: Crises & Pandemics

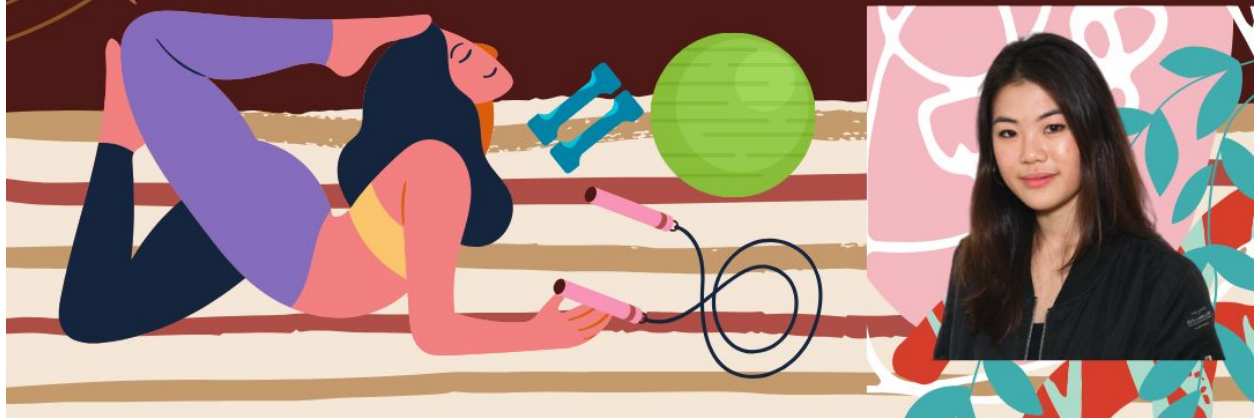
SWEAT OUT THE STRESS!

Dealing with stress with home exercises

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HOSTED BY
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GUEST SPEAKER
MS. PUA YU QING
Fitness enthusiast &
social media influencer



Intro:

Hi there! Welcome to Episode 2 of MMI Podcast: Mental Health during Crises and Pandemics. Hope that you enjoy this episode, and do watch this space as we provide you with more episodes to come. Also, do follow us on Facebook at Malaysian Medics International or our website, malaysianmedics.org to learn more about our interesting podcasts

Luanne:

Welcome to the second episode of our MMI Podcast Series, Mental Health during Crises and Pandemics. My name is Luanne and today's episode is "Sweat Out the Stress".

So today, we have invited Ms Pua Yu Qing, a gym fitness enthusiast and social media influencer focusing on fitness, exercises and art. She will be sharing her experiences during the MCO, as well as her fitness strategies and possible workout ideas without gym equipment to cope with the stress of being cooped up at home during the COVID-19 crisis.

Welcome Yu Qing! How are you?

Yu Qing:

Hi, nice to meet you! It's really a pleasure to be a part of this episode.

Luanne:

Its really nice to have you on board! So Yu Qing, could you first introduce yourself to the audience to let them know a bit about what you do and what your hobbies are.

Yu Qing:

Yeah sure. Hi guys, my name is Yu Qing, and I am a full-time web and app designer, so basically I create interfaces for a living. So, as you can tell, its quite a sedentary-kind of job, so I try to balance out my screentime with home workouts or just going to the gym.

Other than working out, I tend to gravitate towards doing more creative things like painting, doing graphic designs and occasionally I read as well.

Luanne:

I see, that sounds really really good! So you did mention that your job is quite a sedentary one, but then from your Instagram posts, I can tell that you lead quite an active lifestyle. So, with the MCO in place, how has it really impacted you personally? Because you can't go to the gym, you can't go out for a run like you might normally do right? So how has it really impacted you?

Yu Qing:

To be honest, it has taken a toll on me mentally within the first 2 weeks. Because the lifestyle change was indeed very drastic, it took me quite some time to get used to it. So breaking out of the usual routine of not going to the gym in the morning was really tricky, plus, I find myself that I have a lot more energy at the end of the day, so I prefer to actually do my workouts later after dinner - say around 8.30? I find that it helps me relax a lot more when I workout at night, plus I have to switch up my workout routine with very limited equipment at home.

So that was actually quite different because I tend to do more weight training in the gym; so I don't have a barbell at home, I have to kind of substitute it with lighter weights, or basically household items to achieve the same result that I would like to achieve.

Luanne:

Yeah, it's quite difficult to continue doing your usual routine now because it's pretty difficult to get access to the things that you are used to, right?

Yu Qing:

Yeah, how about you?

Luanne:

It's pretty hard for me, like I prefer to go out running. To not be able to go out and run, to feel the sun and the road, it's very different. So my cardio workouts are pretty much gone!

Yu Qing:

Yeah that's the thing, totally agree!

Luanne:

What about the people around you? Like, how have they been coping with it?

Yu Qing:

Umm, many of my friends have struggled through initially - we kind of call up through Zoom and also our Facetime sessions. Even though we still see each other virtually, it doesn't feel the same? It's like your mind and your body has some kind of dissonance there? So initially I see them struggle through, but I realised and observed that they have been, like doing more creative things? For example, they are actually Instagramming themselves doing live workouts because there are a lot of fitness trainers out there that are doing free live streams at a set time, many of them actually tune in to do workouts, and they actually share about how intense it was - yeah, it's quite beautiful to see how people are so supportive as a collective in this crisis.

And there's also this paradigm shift where everyone started to go on TikTok; it's really funny to see people creating very interesting content nowadays.

Luanne:

That's very true! I think to me, when it comes to workout videos, I've even seen TikTok videos of people using their cats as weights? I guess that's additional cardio right, because you have the fear of the cats, y'know, scratching out your eyes.

Yu Qing:

Yes, your cats, your dogs - like basically some use even like pails to just add water to the pails to make it weighted. Some use baskets, detergent, rice bags - the most extreme one I've seen is actually like gas tanks.

Luanne:

Oh my gosh...

Yu Qing:

Yeah! Because that's basically the heaviest thing you can find in the house. I saw a couple of them did it, so I decided to give it a shot but it was just simply too heavy that I just didn't bother attempting it again!

Luanne:

I think that's out of my comfort zone to try out.....

What do you think about the stress levels of people in general during this period of time since we are all cooped up at home? There's no outlet for us to vent out any stress we might have, so what's your experience with this?

Yu Qing:

I do feel stressed out when I'm very confined in one tiny room for like a good 5 hours? So I do walk around the house, and sometimes I still go out to get like groceries. I mean it's not like we can't go out, it's just really, very restricted movement. I've tried to find an outlet to release my stress through workouts; I watch a lot of content online to get more inspiration.

Luanne:

Yeah, I guess like little things, like routine helps to keep us going right?

Yu Qing:

Yeah basically I just tend to do things that I find myself enjoying more, whether it's like cooking, or like making coffee in the morning. Like tiny little things like that - I find it very therapeutic? How about yourself?

Luanne:

I think for me, like I wish I had a routine. My sleeping patterns have now diverged into something else completely. I wake up at noon, I sleep in the morning. Not exactly the best to follow, maybe that's something I would change!

Yu Qing:

Yeah so true.

Luanne:

So would you say that exercise is quite a good way to cope with the stress then of being at home?

Yu Qing:

Yeah!

Luanne:

So how we use exercise to cope with stress. And I think Arisha was saying how she walks around and she does a bit of exercise just to get her moving throughout the day.

Yu Qing:

That's really good! Somehow if you do like some pushups or some squats, you feel better?

Luanne:

I think, just based on this conversation, we can easily tell that staying active is quite difficult for a lot of us to do. So do you have any idea how we can try to keep up with the motivation to exercise? Or at least try to exercise?

Yu Qing:

Yeah I actually have a couple of tips that I can share with you guys. So one thing that I do is that I try to lower the barrier of entry lah, so to speak. When I wake up, I put on like my workout attire for the whole day, so that's like one way to ensure that I would do at least a quick workout after I'm done with my work. Yeah, basically I wanna put myself in that kind of situation where I cannot escape. Whenever I wear my sports bra, whenever I wear my leggings, I HAVE to work out.

Luanne:

I see! So it's kind of like priming your brain to workout right? That's actually quite a good way to go about it!

Yu Qing:

Yeah! Because, like let's say you wear your house clothes, you're like "ah, I need to switch up, I need to change into my workout attire" - that's like 1 extra hurdle for you to go through in the day? So I want to make it as easy as possible, and it also helps with chores so you have less laundry to do as well.

Luanne:

Oh, hmm you're right! Life hack!

Yu Qing:

Yeah, so that's one life hack! And if you're struggling to start, I would recommend to just try and do a quick 5-minute workout in the day. I mean you don't have to do a very intense workout every day because it's all about consistency and not intensity? So I would rather you workout 5 minutes in the day across 7 days a week and not just workout, let's say, once a week.

Luanne:

Yeah, it's kind of like tricking your brain or reducing the friction to do that exercise, and then when you start, you start off at an easier pace so your brain is like "Oh you know what, that's not too bad, let's just do a bit more, do something a bit harder, do it for a bit longer"

Yu Qing:

Yeah, just start off small, I mean it's still progress anyways. And somehow when you just tell yourself with that kind of mindset, like "okay, today I wanna do a quick 5-min workout", but it always ends more than that? Because rarely do you finish a workout in 5 minutes. In my opinion, usually when you start, you probably do at least a quick 15 instead? Even just like, when you stand up and do a bit of squats, then sometimes when you're in the mood, you're already warmed up, you're like "okay, I can push further". So that kind of gives momentum to you as well.

Luanne:

Okay. It's quite a good tool to have.

Yu Qing:

Yeah, you don't have to always aim for the stars and have to do like a very intense 45 minute workout; the intensity is not really necessary if you're trying to build a habit. So always start small, and that will help you build momentum. Starting small is always the hardest, but if you make it as easy as possible, I think it won't be that challenging actually.

And also, if you're trying to build a habit, try not to skip this new habit for 2 days consecutively. Because then, you would lose motivation. I actually got this tip from a Youtuber called Matt D'Avella; he's like a productivity advocate, and he shared about this rule called "The 2-Day Rule" whereby you try to build a new habit; but once you skip past the third day, then you kind of lose momentum then you just go back to square one.

Luanne:

Yeah I think I've watched that video as well - it's generally seeking just like a habit-building tool as well right?

Yu Qing:

Yeah if you really don't want to workout, you can always just associate it with something that you enjoy doing. So for me, I sometimes do dread working out - I'm not gonna lie - so what I'll do is I always put myself in the mood; I'll listen to upbeat, very high energy music, so from there I'll get really, really pumped; somehow, psychologically, I have the "oomph" to go and workout, you get what I mean?

Luanne:

Yeah, that's pretty good, that's why gyms use it as well right?

Yu Qing:

Exactly!

Luanne:

So, in terms of like a 5-minute workout, what would you recommend our audience try out at least? If let's say I don't really workout, and I don't really know where to start, what would you recommend that I do for like something to prime my body to start working out?

Yu Qing:

Sure! You can always start with like a quick warm up, so if you want to count a working set of 5 minutes, I would recommend just going for 5 minutes, and do as many rounds as you can. I'll usually mix it up, let's say 5 movements, 1 minute each - so maybe squats, crunches, push ups and one more ab workout, maybe leg raises. Just do 1 minute each; that's like 5 minutes already!

Luanne:

I see. In terms of your schedule, would you mind just sharing how?

Yu Qing:

Sure! So like Monday I'll do chest (so mainly upper body), then Tuesday I'll do legs, Wednesday I'll do back, Thursday I'll do mainly abs, Friday I'll do a full body cardio, and Saturdays and Sundays I'll just either take one day off or I'll do a bit of stretching like yoga, like light exercises.

Luanne:

I see, so every day you're still moving, but you're moving a different part of your body?

Yu Qing:

Different muscles.

Luanne:

That's pretty good as well!

Yu Qing:

Thank you!

Luanne:

We also saw on your instagram as well, that you used household objects as weights and replacing gym equipment that you are familiar with in order to do your workouts. So for the layman (and for maybe better grip), what would you recommend the general public try to use if they want to use weights for their workouts?

Yu Qing:

The most accessible one I would say would be water bottles, rice bags! I mean I would assume that most Asian households would at least have a pack of rice.

Luanne:

I see!

Yu Qing:

Other than that, I think maybe cooking oil? Those 5 kgs ones? Or there's the 2 kg ones? Those are great for dumbbell replacements.

Luanne:

Yeah! I think what I quite enjoyed about some of your videos is that the household objects that you used are very accessible, like they are objects that we are all familiar with you know? So it's quite a useful way of using them other than for their intended use.

Yu Qing:

Yeah! So just like some background on how I came up with the idea of making a household video workout video, I was actually really, really stressed out at work. So I needed an outlet right, and I was having lunch that day, and I stumbled upon this video on Facebook, and this lady, she did like a full body workout using ONLY toilet paper rolls. I got so inspired, then I just had the idea of like "how do I Malaysian-ize it and re-package this content to make it better?" So I just went around the house, and yeah that's why I have all these random equipment that I put in the video that's like wok, there is a mop, there's is detergent - yeah so you can imagine which part of the house that I went to and I got all these ideas. So I gathered all of them and just did a video, and I did them out of fun - I just needed an outlet. But I did not expect it to blow up that much. So I wanted to just switch things up since everybody was just doing body weights and HIIT. Then I was just thinking "how can I make this better?", "how can I make this more interesting and accessible to everybody?", because I think, what I had in mind was people were probably going to get bored of doing so much of HIIT workouts, maybe they can switch things up a bit with an object. It's still something new, kinda has like some novelty in there just to keep things fresh.

Luanne:

That's true, that's really nice! So speaking about productivity right, I know we've talked about the 2-Day rule, which is about priming yourself and stuff, but let's say in terms of work-wise, cause I imagine that you would be working at home during this period of time right? So how do you continue going about doing your work? Like how do you stay focused?

Yu Qing:

Sure! So the first tip that I would say is to have a set designated workplace. The first 2 weeks I actually worked in my room - it was a very bad move. Try not to work in a place where you usually relax, because I don't know, for me the environment plays a role when it comes to my productivity, so the first 2 weeks I did a trial run working in my room. I didn't like it because it's just not a place where I'm very used to work. I needed a place where it resembles an office, like there's people around, there's sound, there's noise; so I shifted my workplace down to the dining table instead, where I get to see people. So it's like a conditioning thing I would say? Having like a designated working place really helps with my productivity and also having like comfortable clothes, proper lighting, good airflow plays a role as well.

Second tip I would say is to set boundaries. Especially working full-time, when you're very used to having an office space and there's no environmental change when it comes to work and relaxing at home; so I always set a cut-off point where I just stop looking at my emails, stop looking at design work - say about 6 pm every day. Otherwise, it's easy for you to just overwork and there isn't like a balance for you, and I find that it affects with me mentally.

Luanne:

Basically kind of readapting yourself to create like a proper workspace in your surroundings and to just really know when to stop working and when to allow yourself to relax, because you need a routine as well to carry forth throughout the day right? What about computer use? Because imagine people our age are going to be staring at computers the whole day because we're addicted to our technology (laughs); I think there's just no going about it right? So what would you recommend us to do then to limit our use?

Yu Qing:

Actually for me at work, I would set "focus sprints"? So I'll set a timer, and for every 1 hour that I am doing pure solid work (no distractions), I would take like a 20 minutes break after that. It helps with my eyes, and it just helps me regain my balance again, it helps me focus a lot more throughout the day. It's very important to give your eyes a break, especially staring at numbers, staring at very time-visual stuff.

I have glasses, like the blue-light filter glasses?

Luanne:

Oh yeah, I have those as well!

Yu Qing:

Yeah, I find it really helps with my eyes. It doesn't really hurt as much at the end of the day?

Luanne:

And I think most electronics have those blue light filters as well, like you can set a timer to turn it on and off in the day. Yeah because I realised that blue light is pretty harmful to us, especially when it comes to our sleeping patterns as well; because when we have high exposures of blue light, then it resets our circadian rhythm (which is the system that controls our sleep patterns) - that's why a lot of us tend to sleep quite late throughout this period of time because of prolonged usage. I can feel the effect on me at least, I'm not too sure about you.

Yu Qing:

I see, yes definitely it affects my sleep and my schedule! To be honest, this RMO thing really did like a hard reset on my life. My day-to-day routine is all over the place - it really took a good 2 weeks to find like a good rhythm a build a routine upon that.

Luanne:

Definitely. What about food-wise? Because I know that during this period of time, especially for those who don't really know how to cook, they have to rely on delivery services like Grab or Foodpanda to order food in. But then again, a lot of eateries are closing down, so they have to cook for themselves. So what would you do in that scenario to try and at least keep healthy or keep a balance?

Yu Qing:

So I'm thankful to be staying with my family. My mum tends to cook really, really healthy stuff at home actually. She's quite health-conscious because she was once a pharmacist, so naturally at home eating clean is not hard or unhealthy. But when it comes to people who have access to cooking utensils at home, actually healthy eating is not hard at all. If you're struggling to find ideas, or simply don't know how to cook, there are many resources online that you can find on Youtube.

2 of my favourite channels would be Fit Men Cook and The Domestic Geek. So Fit Men Cook - he makes healthy eating seem very interesting, it doesn't taste like *death*. It's very flavourful! From the way he cooks his chicken, it's not like dry and bland. He plays around with spices like Mexican spices, or like simple marinades with yoghurt or teriyaki - so I would say healthy eating is really not that hard, and you don't need to be eating chicken breast and broccoli every day to get 6-packs.

Luanne:

Yeah, I mean that's a fair point. Healthy food should at least be fun and at least delicious to eat right?

Yu Qing:

Yeah it is! You just need to know how to play around with your spices. It doesn't have to be very greasy or dirty to be flavourful, and I would say that healthy eating means differently to different people. Some people may say it's just higher vegetable intake and less meat, some would argue high protein and a low fibre diet, so it's very hard to pinpoint like in terms of healthy eating. To me, I would say it's to know what you eat, and be mindful and conscious about what you eat.

Luanne:

Yeah, I think it's a good takeaway message for a lot of us here.

Yu Qing:

You don't want to just eat just because it's meat or protein; you want to know okay, think capsicum - you get different vitamins, eating broccoli for what - you need to know why you're eating those kinds of food. Because it's easy for you to have vitamin deficiencies if you only just eat 1 type of menu every day throughout the week.

Luanne:

That's true. It's kind of like knowing "you are what you eat" and you should know what you eat.

Yu Qing:

Yeah, because all these things does play a role with your focus, your mental health - if you constantly eat unhealthy food, then I would believe that your body would produce more stress hormones. I would believe that because you are what you eat right; if you change your diet, naturally you feel better, you have more energy, you don't feel as lethargic, you can focus better which would help you better with your work and your overall well-being.

Luanne:

That's true. So literally, healthy body, healthy mind!

Yu Qing:

Yeah! It's like all these things I feel like people mislook. Like "oh I workout I should be healthier"; but whatever you eat will play a role.

Luanne:

That's very true. What about people who like treats? Because I know personally, for myself and a lot of my other friends, they probably miss bubble tea and just generally treats. So what can we generally do about them then? Because treats aren't generally healthy - they are like chips, ice cream, bubble tea - so what can we do to at least replace them, or at least have healthier alternatives?

Yu Qing:

Yes, once in a while when you have cheat days, it's fine, but I do enjoy good food. So what I would do is portion control. So instead of consuming just 1 large, brown sugar, boba tea; I would maybe share with a friend.

Luanne:

How would you go about portion-control wise? I know you mention sharing with your friends, or are there other ways of doing it?

Yu Qing:

Or try to reduce the sugar. Once in a while if you indulge, it's fine, you won't put on weight just from drinking 1 cup of bubble tea in a day. I mean what life is all about is balance anyways, you don't want to go and eat super clean and you miss out all the joys of life and feel depressed - then what's the point? Yeah, you don't want to put yourself in that situation - just be mindful of what you're eating and it's okay to indulge once in a while. Just make sure that you don't go overboard; that's the best tip I can give, that's how I live my life. I don't binge, I don't go from one end to another; I try to keep everything in balance.

Luanne:

But if let's say I'm eating like chips, because I feel like some people like me, we eat chips today, but the next day I forget that I had chips, and I'm like "I didn't have chips, so I'm going to get some chips"?

Yu Qing:

Yeah, if you're just starting out at home and you like to snack - let's say if you buy 2 packets of chips, just buy 1 packet and replace the second with nuts or something.

Luanne:

Hahah well that's the same for me, so :(

Yu Qing:

So you want to make junk food as inaccessible for you at home. Slowly lah, I mean I won't say you completely just won't eat chips; maybe you can stop it with multigrain chips instead. Other than that, I would say never, ever eat chips out of the bag because you cannot benchmark and you would just finish the entire bag before you know. So just put it in let's say a small-sized bowl. From there you can roughly estimate how much you're eating so you won't go overboard. But eating straight out of the bag is by far the worst thing you can do because I tried it many times and I always finish the entire bag of chips. It's all baby steps; what works for me might not work for you, you have to experiment for yourself.

Luanne:

That's very true. Just kind of playing around and finding what works would help. So I think we are coming towards the end of own time, is there any particular message you want to leave with our audience or any take home ideas that you would want to share?

Yu Qing:

Sure! Since this is for the RMO, people are feeling really stressed out and really cooped up, I would like to say; try to be active at home. It doesn't have to be running around the house or an intense sweat session. All you need to do is just do a quick 5-10 minutes workout that would help you relax a bit; stay active - be a little bit productive! Honestly, eating healthy is not that hard, because it's always a choice; whether you want to switch to this lifestyle or not. But make it fun, make it as accessible as you can, and just be consistent, don't give up. A lot of things just takes time to build and even though if you fail within your first week, there's always your second week to try it out.

Luanne:

That's a really good note to end on. So in summary, in terms of cooking and eating healthy: portion control, just trying something new (even from TikTok videos), going out to explore what works for you and what doesn't; and in terms of maintaining productivity, having your time sprint, having a proper workspace to work in and to set boundaries and set timers to allow yourself to relax throughout the day. And in terms of exercise tips, keep going, prime your body, prime yourself to start working out. If you find it hard to workout do a little bit first; and if your

body is warm then you can continue working out, and to break it down more evenly throughout the week so you can get a bit of exercise every day.

Yu Qing:

A day with workout is better than a day without workout.

Luanne:

That's the quote that we want to leave our audience with! To our audience, I hope that you had an enjoyable session, and thank you so much Yu Qing for coming on and sharing really valuable advice to all of us.

Yu Qing:

The pleasure is mine! I hope you guys find some value in it

Luanne:

Alright, thanks Yu Qing! Don't forget to follow and rate our podcast on Spotify and iTunes. If you have any questions, comments or feedback, feel free to give us a shoutout on our Facebook page at Malaysian Medics International; till then, stay tuned for our next episode!