



Coping with Stress During COVID-19

What you should know.

When you hear, read or watch news about COVID-19, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress. These signs of stress are normal and may be more likely or pronounced for people who live in or have loved ones living in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. In the wake of an infectious disease, monitor your own physical and mental health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Know how to relieve stress, and know when to get help.

Know the signs of stress.

What follows are behavioral, physical, emotional and cognitive responses that are all common signs of anxiety and stress. You may notice some of them.

Your Behavior

You may experience:

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your use of alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Frequent crying or excessive worrying
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Difficulty communicating or listening
- Difficulty giving or accepting help
- An inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Your Body

Your body shows stress by:

- Having stomach aches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled



Your Emotions

You might feel:

- Anxious or fearful
- Guilty
- Angry
- Heroic, euphoric or invulnerable
- Overwhelmed by sadness

Your Thinking

You might:

- Have trouble remembering things
- Feel confused
- Have trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Have difficulty making decisions

Know how to relieve stress.

You can manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself. The following strategies can help.

Keep things in perspective

Set limits on how much time you spend reading or watching news. You will want to stay up-to-date on changes in the situation, particularly if you have loved ones in places where many people have gotten ill, but make sure to take time away from the news to focus on things in your life that are going well and that you can control.

Get the facts

Find people and resources you can depend on for accurate health information. Learn from them about the outbreak and how you can protect yourself against illness, if you are at risk. You may turn to your family doctor, a local health department, government agencies or an international organization. Avoid getting news from social media.

These two organizations are credible sources of information about infectious disease outbreaks:

World Health Organization (WHO), <https://www.who.int>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov>



Keep yourself healthy

- Eat healthy foods, and drink water
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs
- Get enough sleep and rest
- Get physical exercise

Use practical ways to relax

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you – take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, or engage in hobbies
- Pace yourself between stressful activities, and do a fun thing after a hard task
- Use time off to relax – eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath or talk to family
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends
- Take care of your physical health to help lower your stress
- Take a break to focus on positive parts of your life, like connections with loved ones

Pay attention to your body, feelings and spirit

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of thinking and feeling about this event. Think of how you handled your thoughts, emotions and behavior around past events
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty or angry is common after an event like an infectious disease outbreak, even when it does not directly threaten you
- Connect with others who may be experiencing stress about the outbreak
- Talk about your feelings, share reliable health information and enjoy conversation unrelated to the news to remind yourself of the many important and positive things in your life
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation or helping others in need

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2014, 21 October). Coping with stress during infectious disease outbreaks (Pub. No. SMA14-4885). Retrieved 23 January 2020 from <https://store.samhsa.gov>

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