

Coping with Stress, Fear and Anxiety

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely causing stress, fear and anxiety for you, your family, friends, employees and community.



Outbreaks can be stressful

According to the CDC¹, stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Worsening of mental health conditions.
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.



Everyone reacts differently

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Children and teens.
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors, other healthcare providers and first responders.
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use.



Ways to cope with stress

- **Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories**, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- **Take care of your body.**
 - Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate.
 - Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
 - Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep.
 - Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- **Make time to unwind.** Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- **Connect with others.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- **Get tools to destress.** Try utilizing meditation apps to lower stress levels.
 - Headspace
 - Calm



Support your loved ones

Check in with your loved ones often. Virtual communication can help you and your loved ones feel less lonely and isolated.

Consider connecting with loved ones by:

- Telephone
- Email
- Mailing letters or cards
- Text messages
- Video chat
- Social media

For responders

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic can take an emotional toll on you and you may experience secondary traumatic stress. Secondary traumatic stress is stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event.

There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress reactions:

- Acknowledge that secondary traumatic stress can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic.
- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a book.
- Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.

Learn more tips for taking care of yourself during emergency response.

Get more information about stress management for first responders from the Disaster Technical Assistance Center (SAMHSA).

Get tools, such as meditation apps, to deal with stress management including:

- Headspace – free for healthcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Calm



Need help? Know someone who does?

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others:

- Call 911
- Visit the Disaster Distress Helpline, call 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
- Visit the National Domestic Violence Hotline or call 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224.
- Visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, call 1-800-273-8255 or Chat with Lifeline.
- Visit the Crisis Textline, text TALK to 741741.
- Visit the Veterans Crisis Line, call 1-800-273-8255 or text 838255.
- Call the NAMI HelpLine at 1-800-950-NAMI(6264) Monday through Friday between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm ET for mental health resources or email info@nami.org.

¹<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

