



Tips to Help You Manage Stress Related to Novel Coronavirus, COVID-19

Stress Is Normal

Stress is a healthy human response. It is also a motivating state. That means it helps you:

- Be more aware of your surroundings.
- Get ready to take action.
- Plan and prepare for the future.

Sometimes, situations happen that increase your stress. That can cause problems in your daily life. This information is intended to help you manage stress related to the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19.

The impact of COVID-19

In March 2020, the World Health Organization named COVID-19, a global pandemic. A pandemic generally refers to a disease that has spread widely around the world and has had an impact on society.

It is important for people to know how a virus spreads and how quickly it spreads. But news such as this may increase stress for many people. Some of the reasons for this increased stress are:

- **Uncertainty.** You may be unsure about your personal health and that of your loved ones. Or you may be unsure about your job, your money, where you'll get groceries, and so on.
- **Information overload.** You could be surrounded by information 24 hours a day — from TV, radio, newspapers, social media, internet sites, friends, neighbors, and coworkers.
- **Changes to your daily routines.** Many people are working from home. Others have reduced work hours or have lost jobs. Many families are at home together 24 hours a day. Many children are going to school online.

How the body and mind show stress

There are a number of ways that your body and mind show stress. Some common ways are:

- **Emotionally.** This includes anxiety, fear, grief, irritability, and sadness.
- **Physically.** This includes sleep problems, tension and fatigue.
- **Thinking.** This includes racing thoughts, worry, persistent worry, and negative thought, called rumination.
- **Behaviors.** This includes avoidance, social withdrawal, seeking reassurance, and excessive checking, which is a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

It's important to remember that stressful times come and go. When things are feeling more uncertain, try to focus on those things you can control.

Tips to Help You Manage Stress

There are active steps you can take to manage COVID-19 stress:

- Maintain healthy habits.
- Stay connected and be disconnected sometimes.
- Practice relaxation methods.
- Be aware of your thinking.
- Practice kindness.
- Take reasonable precautions.

Maintain healthy habits

The first step to lower your stress is to keep a daily schedule. Make or maintain healthy habits and routines. This can help boost your mood and energy levels.

- **Make sleep a priority.** Get up at about the same time every day. Go to bed at about the same time every day. Make sure that you are getting enough restful sleep. When you sleep too little or too much, it tends to cause problems.
- **Be physical.** Plan 30 minutes of physical activity or exercise every day. Use a variety of activities so you stay interested and engaged. Walking is a great option. Plan to go outside to get fresh air every day.
- **Eat well.** Nourish your body with foods that support your health. Examples include fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, and whole grains. Other healthy foods are fish, lean meats, beans, and legumes. These foods give you long-lasting energy.
- **Hydrate well.** Drink plenty of water.
- **Take care of yourself:**
 - Wake up your brain: Start each day with a shower or bath. Get dressed.
 - Stay engaged with activities that are meaningful to you.
 - Keep up with your daily chores.
 - Take the medications prescribed to you and a daily vitamin.
 - Ask for help if you struggle to take care of yourself.

Stay connected *and* disconnected

Make plans with family members, friends and other social-support people who reliably make you feel better. When physical distancing is advised, use virtual connections such as phone, text and video messaging. Staying connected to healthy social supports is essential to your well-being.

Staying informed about current events also is helpful. But sometimes it can be overwhelming. Set limits on social media and the news. Avoid looking for numerous news sources during the day. Rely on one or two trusted sources.

Finally, think about disconnecting from the news for periods of time during the day. Try this: Schedule 15 to 30 minutes, two times a day, to get news. If your stress level rises, it's perfectly OK to disconnect from electronics and other news sources.

Practice relaxation methods

Consider all the ways you can relax and manage your stress. Make a list of your favorite options and some others you may not have tried yet. Try some of these options:

- Relaxed breathing (deep breathing)
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Muscle stretches
- Listening to music
- Going for a drive
- Watching something that makes you laugh

Put this list where you can see it. **Schedule small amounts of relaxation throughout your day. This can help relieve your stress before it builds to a level that interferes with your day.**

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be an especially helpful way to lower stress. Worries force you to focus inward on distressing thoughts. Mindfulness helps you learn how to change your focus to the environment around you.

When you are mindful, you don't fight with your thoughts. You learn how to direct your attention, awareness and thoughts back to the present moment. Mindfulness is about focus. You focus only on what is happening right now. You focus with intention and purpose, without judgment. When you are being mindful, you are present in the moment and accept the moment as it is. This practice can be very calming.

Be aware of your thinking

Worry is common during times of stress. Worry can change how you think in three ways. You may:

- **Catastrophize**, or think the worst.
- **Overestimate** the likelihood that bad things will happen to you.
- **Underestimate** your ability to cope when bad things happen.

The more anxious you get, the less flexible your thinking becomes. Try to keep this in mind:

- The **most** catastrophic outcomes tend to be the **least likely** to happen.
- The **least** catastrophic outcomes tend to be the **most likely** to happen.

If you worry a lot, try this exercise. To start, write down five worries. Next, directly challenge those worries. To do that, think about each worry and write out answers to these questions:

- What is a different, less-negative way to look at this situation?
- What is the real likelihood that this will happen?
- What objective evidence do I have that supports my worry?
- What objective evidence do I have against this worry?
- How have I coped with situations like this in the past?

It's important to write out these thoughts. Doing that helps you train your brain to be more flexible.

Practice kindness

As stress goes up, a person's tolerance can go down. Try to be patient, kind and helpful. Do what you can to be a positive influence on others. Work together as a team when possible. Think about how you can help people in need. For example, donate food or money to a food pantry, donate blood or do lawn care for a family that may be struggling right now.

Take reasonable precautions

Check on the resources you have at home. Make a shopping list of what you actually need. Don't buy more than you need now or will need in the near future.

Keep up to date with your local health authorities or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Know the best way to clean your hands and disinfect surfaces. Know when it's necessary to use a face mask. Avoid doing more than the precautions recommended by those experts.

Closing Thoughts

It is understandable for people to feel more stress in times like these. Many changes are happening. And they can have a direct impact on your daily life.

- Remember that you've gone through stressful times before. Use that experience to help you get through this. Over time, things will move from being uncertain to being more certain.
- If it's appropriate, avoid making big decisions at this time. Talk to a trusted advisor, friend or family member as needed.
- Keep track of your overall stress level. Remember to use the stress-relief methods that have helped you before. Schedule small amounts of relaxation throughout your day. Quick, easy methods include relaxed breathing and simple body stretches held for a few seconds.
- Know your stress limits. If it's hard for you to cope, reach out to supportive friends or family. Contact your health care team if needed. They can talk to you about local resources and any appropriate treatment options you may have.

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