

Managing Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have had a negative effect on many people's mental health and has also created new barriers for people who were already suffering from mental illness. Measures to slow the spread of the virus, such as social distancing, business and school closures, and shelter-in-place orders have lead to greater isolation from others and negatively affects our mental health. Feelings of anxiety and depression are increasingly common, as people are upset and fearful of themselves and of loved ones falling ill and of the repercussions of the pandemic. Not knowing when it will end only adds to the stress and anxiety people are experiencing.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How one responds to the outbreak depends on many things, including your background, your unique traits, and the community you live in. 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 health care providers, and first responders.
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use.

The following are some helpful 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.
- Take care of yourself and your community. Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

Need help or know someone who does? If you have concerns for someone you care about, or if you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, depressed, or anxious, you can access one of the following resources for assistance:

- Call the Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.
- Contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

This is a national helpline that is a free, confidential, 24/7 365 day a year treatment referral and information service. It is offered in English and Spanish. Their number is 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

In an emergency situation in which you or someone you care about has thoughts of harming self or others, call 911 immediately.

This too shall pass. Be well and stay safe.