

MANAGING ANXIETY AND STRESS DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children.

Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, 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 COVID-19
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use

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
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Sharing the facts about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful. Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress.

- Evaluate your own risk levels such as age or if you have an underlying health condition. If you have a higher risk, take extra measures to protect yourself.
- Get your news regarding the coronavirus from reliable sources like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They will reinforce what you should do, and that most people who get the coronavirus will recover.
- Get away from the overload of conflicting news.
- Limit social media if it increases your anxiety.
- Exercise at home if you are physically able.
- If you have school age children, talk to them and explain why they may not be going to school right now. Keep them on a school schedule. If the school does not provide online schoolwork, have them read, write in a journal, etc.
- Get good sleep

Use practical ways to relax:

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you – take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, wash your face and hands, or engage in pleasurable 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 often.
- Ground yourself in the present moment through mindfulness.

Set limits to how much time you spend reading or watching news about the outbreak. You will want to stay up to date on news 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.

If you or a loved one are experiencing symptoms of extreme stress and anxiety, call your **E**mployee **A**ssistance **P**rogram to be connected to a professional counselor who can assist.



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