



COVID – 19 And Coping with Stress

Outbreaks can be stressful

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.**

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 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 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

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.

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 [meditateexternal icon](#).
 - [Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals](#).
 - [Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep](#).
 - Avoid [alcohol](#) and [drugsexternal icon](#).
- **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.

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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 Helplineexternal icon](#), call 1-800-985-5990, or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- Visit the [National Domestic Violence Hotlineexternal icon](#) or call 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224

Know the facts to help reduce stress

Sharing the facts about COVID-19. Understanding the risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful.

When you share accurate information about COVID-19, you can help make people feel less stressed and make a connection with them.

Related: [Reducing Stigma](#) and [Stop the Spread of Rumors](#)

Take care of your mental health

Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) [Disaster Preparednessexternal icon](#) page.

Related: [Taking Care of Your Emotional Health](#)

For parents

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Watch for behavior changes in your child

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Ways to support your child

- **Talk with your child or teen** about the COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Answer questions** and **share facts about COVID-19** in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- **Reassure your child or teen** that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- **Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage** of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- **Try to keep up with regular routines.** If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- **Be a role model.** Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

Related: [Caring for Children](#) and [Helping Children Cope](#)