

Managing Stress & Anxiety During COVID-19

Responding to uncertainty

During a crisis or epidemic, we are uncertain on how to respond and facing the unknowns can create or increase stress and anxiety. Feeling threatened and overwhelmed can trigger our survival mode, which increases worry and rumination.

Fear can shift our focus from planning and coping to stress and anxiety.

The coronavirus outbreak may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about the 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.

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.

For some, the interruption of daily routine and social distancing can create significant anxiety and feelings of uneasiness and loss of control.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include: Fear and worry about your own health or the health of loved ones. Changes in sleep or eating. Difficulty concentrating. Worsening of chronic health problems. Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Rumination about the disease and irritability, just to name a few.

Taking care of yourself

Avoid oversaturation of information. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting and feed rumination.

Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid drugs or excessive alcohol use.

Take time to unwind. Do some activities you enjoy.

Maintain your connections with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and feelings. Find new and creative ways to maintain personal connections and support systems, like a virtual book club or adopt a pen pal.

Take advantage of modern technology to occupy your time. Rent an e-book from the library through apps like Hoopla. Try a 5-minute guided meditation by downloading a mindfulness app like Calm, Breathe or Headspace. Take a 30-minute exercise class on YouTube. Explore Pinterest for new hobbies. Visit Positively Positive for a daily dose of inspiration.

Find ways to enrich your life, reevaluate goals and set new achievable ones.

Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities.

Educate yourself – understand the actual risk to yourself and people you care about. This can make the outbreak less stressful. Share accurate information.

Shift thinking from negative “what ifs,” to “What can I do? What do I have control over?”

Maintain personal rituals to anchor yourself during times of uncertainty like exercising or meditation, cooking, reading, art, etc. If your daily rituals have been interrupted, get creative and instead of focusing on the loss, look to inherit or try new activities.

Laugh!

Get a good night’s sleep. Being well-rested can fight stress and anxiety.

People with pre-existing mental-health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms.

Resources: CDC, WHO, NAMI, MO Dept. of Mental Health

We are in uncharted territory. Everything is different. And yet, everything is the same. Although our temporary circumstances have changed, God remains the same. He is still with us, listening to us, and always extending His peace to our troubled hearts.

For more information and resources, check out our website:

SaintLouisCounseling.org