

## Coping With COVID-19: Managing Stress and Anxiety

**It's hard to escape news updates about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The constant headlines may make some people anxious.** In particular, older adults, people with chronic health conditions, and caregivers are likely to be at higher risk for increased stress and anxiety, since they face a higher risk of illness if they contract the virus.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), here's what stress during an infectious disease outbreak can look like:

- **Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones**
- **Changes in sleeping or eating habits**
- **Difficulty sleeping or concentrating**
- **Worsening of chronic health problems**
- **Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs**

You may not be able to control the virus, but you can help control your emotional reaction to it.

### Here are some smart strategies from the CDC to help you manage your anxiety:

#### Take breaks.

Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including on social media. Hearing about the pandemic over and over can be upsetting.

#### Take care of your body.

Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Here's a free guide on how to meditate from Mindful magazine: <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-meditate/>

#### Eat healthy, well-balanced meals.

Read this helpful guide from the CDC on how to create a nutritious diet plan: <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/national-nutrition-month/index.html>

#### Exercise regularly.

For older adults, the CDC recommends aiming for 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity such as brisk walking. Do walk outside on nice days but avoid crowded places and make sure to maintain a six-foot distance between you and others. Wash your hands when you get home.

**Get plenty of sleep.**

Following these simple sleep tips can help you relax into a good night's sleep:  
[https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about\\_sleep/sleep\\_hygiene.html](https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/sleep_hygiene.html)

**Relax by doing activities you enjoy.**

Try crossword or jigsaw puzzles, get outside and garden if you can, cook healthy meals and freeze some for later, and seek out TV shows to watch that give you pleasure. Explore your library's online offerings.

**Connect with others.**

You may not be able to socialize in person for a while, but many older adults are turning to video chat options such as FaceTime visits on their smartphone, Skype calls, and Zoom calls. These virtual visits are the next best thing to spending time in person with friends and family.

**Find virtual support.**

**If you already have issues with your mental health or substance use**, you may find it even harder to cope right now. Many in-person groups are holding online meetings to provide each other with mutual support:

■ **Alcoholics Anonymous**  
<http://aa-intergroup.org/>

■ **SMART Recovery**  
<https://www.smartrecovery.org/smart-recovery-toolbox/smart-recovery-online/>  
(for any substance use or addictive behavior)

■ **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)**  
[https://www.supportgroupscentral.com/groups\\_detail.cfm?cid=18](https://www.supportgroupscentral.com/groups_detail.cfm?cid=18)  
(for any mental health condition)

■ **Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)**  
<https://adaa.org/adaa-online-support-group>  
(for any mental health condition)

**If your stress reactions are interfering with your life for 2 weeks in a row or longer, call your healthcare provider.**

**If you are feeling overwhelmed**, the CDC recommends using the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline**:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

**Phone: 1-800-985-5990**

**Text: text TalkWithUs to 66746.**

**TTY: 1-800-846-8517**

**If you feel like you want to harm yourself or others, call 911.**