



## COVID-19 and Your Mental Health

**COVID-19 has caused much undue worry, stress, and anxiety for many people, and its impact can be overwhelming. Social and physical distancing, and the new way of living can make it even more challenging.**

### **Learn ways to COPE during COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely brought many changes to how you live your life, and along with this comes uncertainty, adjustments in daily routines, financial pressures and a drastic changes in social activities. You may have fears about getting sick, ponder how long the pandemic will go on, and even worry about what the future looks like for world. Information overload, rumors, misinformation, *(and even misleading information)* can make your life feel out of control and make it unclear about what to do.

During this horrific pandemic of COVID-19, you may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness about many different things, and symptoms of certain mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression may become worse.

### **Learn how to advocate for yourself and develop self-care strategies to help you cope effectively**

Self-care strategies are good for both mental and physical health, and can help you take charge of your overall wellness. Take care of your body and your mind and connect with others to benefit your mental health.

### **Take CARE of your body**

#### **Be mindful about your overall health:**

- **Get proper sleep.** Develop a health sleep routine. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time each day. Stick to a routine schedule as much as possible.
- **Engage in regular physical activity.** Regular physical activity or exercise can help to reduce stress, anxiety, and improves mood. Find an activity that includes movement of some kind. There are some good apps you can search and try. Get outside in an area that makes it easy to maintain distance from people — perhaps your own neighborhood or nearby walking trail.
- **Eat right.** Choosing a well-balanced, healthy diet is key. Avoid loading up on junk food and refined sugar. Caffeine can aggravate stress and anxiety, so limit intake as much as possible.
- **Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.** If you smoke tobacco or if you vape, you're already at higher risk of lung disease. Because COVID-19 affects the lungs, your risk increases even more. Avoid unhealthy ways to cope and choose to say "no" to self-medicating with tobacco, alcohol or drugs. Each of these things can lead to worsening symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression - even lead to dependence and addictions.



## Take CARE of your MIND

Reduce triggers of stress and anxiety:

- **Limit time in front of devices.** Set times during the day to disengage from screen time on any device or TV. Set the cell phone and computer aside a minimum of 30 minutes before going to bed.
- **Make time for yourself.** Rest, relax, and recharge. A few minutes of quiet time each day can be refreshing and help to quiet your mind - which helps to reduce stress and anxiety. There are multiple apps that you can try to help calm the mind. There are many things you can do to relax and unwind, such as taking a warm bath, reading, deep breathing exercises, walking, or even learning meditation.
- **Keep a balanced routine.** Maintaining a balanced schedule is important to your mental health. In addition to sticking to a regular bedtime routine, keep consistent times for meals, bathing and getting dressed, work or study schedules, and exercise. Also set aside time for activities you enjoy. This predictability can make you feel more in control.
- **Limit exposure to news media.** Constant news about COVID-19 from all types of media can heighten fears about the disease. Limit social media that may expose you to rumors and false information. Also limit reading, hearing or watching other news, but keep up to date on national and local recommendations. Look for reliable sources such as the CDC and WHO.
- **Stay busy.** A distraction can get you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression. Enjoy hobbies that you can do at home, identify a new project or clean out that closet you promised you'd get to. Doing something positive to manage anxiety is a healthy coping strategy.
- **Focus on positive thoughts.** Choose to focus on the positive things in your life, instead of dwelling on how bad you feel. Consider starting each day by listing things you are thankful for. Maintain a sense of hope, work to accept changes as they occur and try to keep problems in perspective.
- **Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support.** If you draw strength from a belief system, it can bring you comfort during difficult times.
- **Set priorities.** Don't become overwhelmed by creating a life-changing list of things to achieve while you're home. Set reasonable goals each day and outline steps you can take to reach those goals. Give yourself credit for every step in the right direction, no matter how small. And recognize that some days will be better than others.



## Stay CONNECTED to Your Community, Family, and Friends

Social and physical distancing doesn't mean you can't stay connected:

- **Stay connected.** Avoid social isolation. While it's important to follow CDC recommendations Engage regularly in virtual connections via FaceTime, Zoom, or similar apps. If able and without symptoms of COVID-19, it's OK to get out of the house - just be sure to follow the proper precautions, such as wearing a face mask and maintaining recommended physical distance. If you're working remotely from home, don't fall into the trap of isolation.
- **Assist others.** Find purpose and meaning in helping the people around you - neighbors, family members, friends, or even a stranger. Reach out and doing something to assist — especially those who are elderly. This might include shopping or picking up prescriptions for an elderly or sick neighbor. Just be sure to follow CDC, WHO, government and local recommendations on social distancing, group meetings, and maintaining your own health and safety. Helping others does wonders for your own mood.
- **Provide support and nurture those with a positive COVID test.** Don't shun those who are ill and in quarantine. COVID-19 can affect anyone at any age, and everyone responds differently. While some may experience minor symptoms, others experience more severe symptoms that persists for lengths of time. Check in with those who are sick and provide support. You can do this virtually and from a distance, but be sure to check in on them and let them know you care.

Stress can be normal physiological response to ongoing demands of life. Everyone responds to stress and copes differently. While normal to feel anxious about COVID-19, if you feel that the ongoing stress, anxiety, or depression is having a significant negative impact on your daily life, it is important to seek help.

If you are experiencing feelings of hopelessness, low mood, no desire for interaction with others or isolation, changes in sleep or appetite, sadness, irritability, anxiousness, unrelieved worry, body aches, crying spells, lack of motivation or other debilitating symptoms, you may be experiencing a mental health conditions, such as depression.

When these types of symptoms persist for two or more weeks, it is important to seek help and to get evaluated by a licensed health care professional. Depression can be serious, and can have a significant impact on both your mental and physical health - and even lead to worsening symptoms when left untreated.



If you're feeling suicidal or thinking of hurting yourself, seek help. Contact your primary care provider or a mental health professional. Or call a suicide hotline. In the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or use its webchat at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat).

### **Continue your self-care strategies**

We are all looking forward to the end of COVID-19. However, while the symptoms that you may be experiencing at present will hopefully fade as the pandemic begins to fade, the undue stress and depressive-symptoms won't just suddenly disappear. Further, the toll these symptoms can take on your body, both mentally and physically, can compromise your health overall.

Be sure to continue self-care, self-advocacy, and seek help as soon as possible. For those already diagnosed with depression, transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) can be safe and effective alternative to medication. TMS is covered by most major health insurance providers, including Medicare, Tricare, and the VA Community Care Network. To locate a clinic near you, visit the TMS Clinic Directory.

