

## **Taking Care of Your Mental Health during the COVID-19 Infectious Disease Outbreak**

Infectious disease outbreaks, including Coronavirus (COVID-19) created a new type of crisis with a great deal of uncertainty about the nature of the disease, its spread, and its impact. This will understandably affect individuals' emotional and mental health wellbeing, even among those who have not been directly exposed to the disease. Reactions to a crisis can appear very different from person to person and can occur at any time. Please consider the following recommendations for promoting your mental wellbeing during this time.

### **Things you can do to support yourself:**

**1. Staying Informed.** Obtain the latest information during an infectious disease outbreak from **credible and reliable** sources of information. Up-to-date, accurate recommendations regarding disease prevention, self and family care, and travel guidance can be found at the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
  
- Ohio Department of Health:  
<https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/home>

**2. Limit media exposure.** Turn off the television and/or alert messaging on your phone if it is increasing your distress. Exposure to media can be healthy or unhealthy. For some individuals, knowing helps to feel a sense of control over the situation. For others, it may reinforce anxiety and fear. Research has shown that excessive media exposure to coverage of stressful events can result in negative outcomes; so, use trusted resources to gather the information you need, and then turn it off if it's causing stress. Recognize that even if you are looking at a social media post, email, or message from a trusted person in your life, that post or link could still contain misinformation.

**3. Anticipate stress reactions.** Emotional distress is common and normal in the context of uncertainty and potentially life-threatening situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**4. Recognize the signs of distress.** Stress can present itself in different ways, including physical, emotional, or cognitive ways. One common response for young adults is a feeling of invincibility, recklessness, and/or emotional detachment, which can lead to behaviors that may significantly increase risks to self and others.

Some **common feelings** during times of stress include: Intense sadness, guilt, anger, fear, and anxiety. More ups and downs with emotions than you may be accustomed to experiencing.

Some **common cognitive responses** during times of stress include: memory issues, confusion, indecisiveness, decreased motivation, and decreased concentration.

Some other common reactions include:

- Excessive worry, hard to stop thinking about it
- Sleeping Issues; having trouble sleeping or staying asleep
- Ruminating (thinking about the same thing over and over again uncontrollably)
- Hypervigilance (feeling overly attentive to any perceived threat)
- Getting up repeatedly from sleep or another activity to check the news or check on family
- Difficulty relaxing
- Muscle tension
- Feel keyed up or on edge
- Increased alcohol, tobacco, or drug use
- Irritability with emotional outbursts
- Wanting to be alone /difficulty communicating
- Crying frequently
- Inability to feel pleasure
- Feeling detached or numb
- Drastic changes in energy level.

**5. Try different strategies to reduce distress. Try a bunch of different ones until you find the fit for you.** Different ones may work at different times of day or for different stressors. The strategies that will work for you will be yours, and what works for you may not work for others. It is important to keep at it and try different things. Some strategies can include:

a. **Being prepared.** Here are some ideas:

- Ask your doctor for a 90-day supply of your daily medications. Can they be mailed to you? Take your prescribed medications as directed by your doctor.
- Go grocery shopping at odd hours. Try to get enough to get you through two weeks of meals. Do not sell out the store. Other people need toilet paper, too!
- Make a plan for yourself and your family that protects you and the most immunocompromised members of your family. What is your plan if one or more of you starts showing symptoms?

- What is your **self-care plan** during this time? Write it down!
- **To keep yourself as healthy as possible.**
    - Keep yourself 10 ft away from as many people as you can at all times.
  - **To start a hobby you've been wanting to try.**
    - Make a movie or slideshow on your computer
    - Try knitting or crocheting
    - Do a puzzle
    - Learn some new dance moves
  - **To be a good friend, family-member, partner, and/or community member.**
    - Send loving texts
    - Write a postcard or a letter
  - **To keep your body fed with nutritious foods.**
    - Have easy snacks handy to eat at times where you do not have the energy to cook.
  - **To keep yourself organized.**
    - Set aside clothes and other items to donate.
    - Organize your junk drawer(s).
    - Throw junk away.
    - Create an organizational system designed specifically for online classes.
  - **To get physical activity.**
    - If it is safe, take a walk outside.
    - Look up an exercise online.
    - Jumping Jacks, Light stretches, or pushups.
  - **To remember and work to achieve your goals and dreams during a difficult time. It may not seem important right now, *but it is!***
    - Break the goals into small daily steps.
    - Create a vision board.
    - Write a letter to your future self about how it will feel to accomplish goals.
  - **To relax your body and your mind.**
    - Listen to soothing music
    - 5 senses mindfulness
    - Mindful eating (see below)
    - Meditation Apps (see below)
    - YouTube videos
      - Yoga with Adrienne
      - Progressive muscle relaxation (see below)
    - **Change your temperature**
      - Hold ice cubes
      - Take a shower or a bath
      - Place a cold or hot washcloth on your forehead.

b. **Educate yourself** about evidence-based preventive measures and public health recommendations to spread out the impact on the healthcare system.

- Hand-washing technique
- Cough etiquette
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands
- [\*Social distancing\*](#) to [\*flatten the curve\*](#) - Click the links for more information.

c. **Talk to loved ones about worries and concerns.**

- Know that your feelings are normal and others may be experiencing them too. Connect with friends and family in virtually if you're isolated. Connect with those you feel closest to for support.

d. **Schedule positive activities.**

- Do things that are typically enjoyable, even if (perhaps especially if) you don't feel like it.
  - Play games (computer, phone, video, board games, card games)
  - Listen to music
  - Exercise
  - Spend time in nature or with animals
  - Journal
  - Read inspirational texts

e. **Take time to renew your spirit** through prayer, meditation, and/or helping others.

- For example, do you have a high-risk elderly neighbor and/or family member? Do they need anything from the outside world that you can provide for them? Do you have neighbors who work in healthcare and are suddenly without childcare? Can you help with that?

f. **Eat a balanced and nutritious diet.**

g. **Get enough sleep (7-9 hours) every night.**

- We know sleep is restorative. It reduces anxiety, helps learning, helps problem solving, and allows the brain to rest. Even short periods of sleep deprivation can be troublesome.

h. **Engage in exercise** as much as possible for overall good health and to help reduce stress.

i. If possible, stick to your daily **routines**. If not, make new ones.

## **Online Resources:**

*Mindfulness is a state of non-judgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment, including the awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and senses.*

Taken from Therapist Aid website

## **Why is mindfulness helpful?**

[Mindfulness as a superpower](#)

## **Care for Your Coronavirus Anxiety Comprehensive Toolkit:**

<https://www.virusanxiety.com/>

## **Helpful Apps for meditation and mindfulness:**

<https://www.calm.com/> Calm (requires subscription)

<https://www.headspace.com/> Headspace (requires subscription)

<https://www.tenpercent.com/> 10% Happier (free)

<https://insighttimer.com/> Insight Timer (free)

<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/> (free sections and subscriptions)

<https://www.simplehabit.com/> (short term meditation)

## **Helpful Online Exercises:**

[Deep breathing](#) for relaxation

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#) – for relaxation and particularly for sleep

[Guided Meditation](#) - Leaves on a Stream

[Guided Gratitude meditation](#) – Gratitude promotes positive mental health and resiliency.

[Mindful Eating Meditation](#) – for enhancing mindfulness through and during habitual activity.

[Mindful Hand-Washing](#) – for enhancing mindfulness during this repeated daily habit during this time.

## **Self-care tips video:**

[Video](#)

## **For a laugh:**

[Wash your hands parody](#)