

How to Cope With Stress During an Infectious Disease Outbreak

You are not alone. During the COVID-19 outbreak, and likely during other points in the year, you may feel anxious, overwhelmed or show other signs of stress. These feelings and symptoms of stress are natural. Sometimes, however, persistent stress can turn into distress that can negatively affect your health and wellbeing. **Distress demands your attention.**

Fortunately, there are a number of things that you can do to prevent stress from turning into distress. Most importantly begin with:

- Monitoring your physical and mental health, and recognizing when you're distressed.
- Knowing what to do to relieve your stress so that it doesn't turn into distress.
- Knowing when it's time to ask for help.

Knowing the signs of distress

Although stress is a normal response to life's challenges, **stress can turn to distress when we feel as though we have more to manage than we have the energy or resources to handle.**

There are many common signs of distress:

- Increased irritability, outbursts of anger or not getting along well with others.
- Trouble sleeping or relaxing.
- Feelings of anxiety, fear, panic, and nonstop worry.
- Wanting to be alone most of the time.
- Not caring about anything.
- Blaming other people for everything.
- Difficulty communicating or listening.
- Trouble remembering things.
- Difficulty giving or accepting help.
- Finding it hard to have fun or feel happy.
- Increased or decreased energy and activity levels.
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or illegal drugs.

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Knowing how to relieve distress

There are many things that you can do to manage stress and distress. First, it is important to **take care of your physical needs** by:

- Eating healthy foods and drinking plenty of water.
- Getting enough sleep, rest and relaxation.
- Getting physical exercise or making time to step outside and breathe some fresh air.
- Avoiding excessive amounts of caffeine, alcohol, tobacco or marijuana, and refraining from using illegal drugs.
- Taking time alone when you need it.
- Making time to connect with people who support your emotional wellbeing.

There are also many ways that you can **take care of your emotional needs**. You may want to try:

- Reducing your media exposure by limiting the amount of time you spend reading, listening to, or watching news about the outbreak.
- Taking time to focus on what is going well in your life, and what you can control.
- Pacing yourself between stressful activities, and doing a fun activity after a stressful task.
- Talking about your feelings with trusted friends and loved ones.
- Doing what you can to relax your body by walking, stretching, slowing down your breathing, listening to soothing music, meditating, reading, or engaging in an enjoyable hobby.
- Connecting with others via the phone, text, chat, messaging or practicing appropriate social distancing (stay at least 6 feet apart).

Knowing when it's time to ask for help

No one is invincible. Infectious disease outbreaks are highly stressful events that affect us all. It is natural to experience some distress regardless of whether or not you or your loved ones are sick or at risk for becoming ill.

Most people will need some form of support during this challenging time, but many may not feel that it is OK to ask for help. But, if we do not care for ourselves, it is nearly impossible to support others, so asking for help is a worthwhile investment in you, and those you care for.

Mental Health and Social Supports



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If you or someone you know shows signs of distress listed above for several days or weeks, you can get help and support by accessing one of the resources below or contacting a local mental health provider.

Call **911** or contact one of the distress helplines listed below **right away** if you or someone you know threatens to hurt or kill himself or herself or someone else, or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.

Emergency Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Toll-Free (Español): 1-888-628-9454 TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)

[Website in English](#)

[Website in Spanish](#)

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990 (English and español)

SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746 SMS (español): "Hablanos" al 66746

TTY: 1-800-846-8517

[Website in English](#)

[Website in Spanish](#)

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral Information Service in English and español) [Website](#)

Non-emergency Resources for Talking To Children

- [Helping Children and Teens Through Loss and Trauma](#)
- [Speaking With Children About Coronavirus](#)
- [CDC Information in English](#)
- [CDC En Español](#)
- [The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency and Academic Success](#)
- [NPR Cartoon – Just for Kids](#)
- [Parent/Caregiver Guide To Helping Families Cope With The Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus | Spanish | Chinese](#)
- Resource for young children in numerous languages: [COVIBOOK](#)