

Coping with stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Advanced Primary Care Newsletter - March 2020

Introduction

Since WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, fear and anxiety has been overwhelming and can cause strong emotions in adults and children.

All of us react differently to stressful situations, some may respond more strongly to the stress of a pandemic than others such as:

- Older individuals
- Individuals with chronic diseases
- Individuals with compromised immune system
- Individuals who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- Individuals who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use

How do I know whether I am emotionally stressed during this infection outbreak?

Emotional stress during an infectious disease pandemic can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Fear and worry about your employment and financial impact from the pandemic
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs



How can I reduce my stress during the pandemic?

It is important to take care of yourself during this stressful period. Things you can do to support yourself such as:

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting and generate fear and anxiety.
- Take care of your body, do relaxing activities such as taking deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.

- Connect with others virtually by telephone or e-mail.
- Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Call APC if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row. Our care team can provide virtual support by telephone.



How can I reduce stress in myself and my love ones?

You can reduce stress in yourself and others by knowing and **sharing the facts** about COVID-19. Knowing the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make the pandemic less stressful.

When you share accurate information about

COVID-19 you can help make people feel less stressed and allow you to connect with them.

As parents how can we help our children during the pandemic?

Children and teens react on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 **calmly and confidently**, they provide the best support for their children.

Some common changes parents should watch for in their children include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs



What can I do to support my children during the pandemic?

There are many things you can do to support your child such as:

- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.

- Limit your family's exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

What can I do to support myself after I have been released from quarantine or self-isolation?

Being separated from others if a healthcare provider thinks you may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be stressful, even if you do not get sick. Everyone feels differently after coming out of quarantine. It is important to identify these emotions and that they are normal, some feelings include:



- Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine
- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine
- Other emotional or mental health changes

For more information, please click on the following link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Let's work together to slow the spread of COVID-19!

Your APC care team