

Taking Care of Your Mental Health during the CoVID19 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. 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 while for others it may reinforce anxiety and fear. Research has shown that excess media exposure to coverage of stressful events can result in negative outcomes. Use trusted resources to gather the information you need then turn it off if it's causing stress.

2. Use trusted resources to stay 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:

- [Center for Disease Control](#)
- [Northwestern University Coronavirus-COVID 19 Website](#)
- [The World Health Organization](#)

3. Anticipate stress reactions. Emotional distress is common and normal in the context of uncertainty and potentially life-threatening situations, such as 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 and or emotional detachment which can lead to behaviors that May significantly increase risks.

- Some other common reactions include: • Excessive worry, hard to stop thinking about what happened • Sleeping Issues; having trouble sleeping or staying asleep • Ruminating • Hypervigilance; getting up 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 • Changes in energy level.
- Some common physical responses can be: diarrhea, aches and pains, and appetite changes.
- Some common feelings are: sadness, guilt, anger, fear, and excessive anxiety.

- Some common cognitive responses can be: memory issues, confusion, indecisiveness and decreased concentration.

5. Try different strategies to reduce stress:

There is no right or wrong way to deal with this stress. What works for you may not work for others. It is important to keep at it and try different things such as:

- Being prepared (e.g., develop a personal/ family plan for the outbreak).
- Educate yourself about preventive measures: from hand-washing technique and cough etiquette, to more complex medical recommendations for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.
- 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 novel ways if you're isolated. Connect with those you feel closest to for support.
- Schedule positive activities. Do things that are enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it. Like listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational texts are some simple ways to help manage emotions.
- Take time to renew your spirit through prayer, meditation or helping others.
- Take care of your body. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Get enough sleep every night. We know sleep is restorative reduces anxiety, helps learning, helps problem solving, and allows the brain to rest. Even short periods of sleep deprivation can be troublesome.
- If possible, stick to your usual daily routine.

Helpful Apps.

[CAPS Northwestern University Breathe App](#)

Other apps include: Mindfulness Coach • Insight Timer • Calm • Headspace • Stop, Breathe, and Think

For most people stress reactions will lessen over the first few weeks. However, when symptoms are significantly impacting functioning, becoming harder to manage, or are increasing in severity then there is increased need for concern. We encourage you to reach out to CAPS. Please call us at 847-491-2151 (24/7).