



Mental Health Tip Sheet



The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented stress. There are the obvious stresses such as financial issues and health concerns. The uncertainty of not knowing what will happen or when things will feel normal can also make us feel anxious and stressed. And social distancing, a necessary public health measure to limit the spread of the virus, can make us feel isolated and lonely.

These feelings are normal. But when stress and anxiety become overwhelming, they can impact relationships, work, school, and daily activities. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to manage your emotions and feel more in control.

Healthy ways to cope with stress

- **Understand the risk, be informed, and get the facts.** Visit [upmc.com/coronavirus](https://www.upmc.com/coronavirus) to stay informed. You can also follow other reputable sites, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization.
- **Take a break from media coverage.** If you find that constant updates about COVID-19 are making you feel more anxious, set limits on how much time you spend watching, reading, or listening to the news.
- **Prioritize feeling good.** Eat healthy, well-balanced meals. Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid overuse of substances, like alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

- **Connect with others.** Virtual meeting apps and social media platforms can help you stay in touch with friends and family. Sharing your ups and downs and hearing about what loved ones are doing can help you feel more connected.
- **Find activities you enjoy.** Now is the time to learn a new skill, catch up on your reading, or start that project you have been wanting to take on.
- **Maintain a sense of hope.** Engage in spiritual self-care. Take deep breaths and stretch or meditate. Journal about the things for which you are thankful.

How to support your family

- Spend time together as a family. Play board games or cards, share favorite TV shows, or cook and eat meals together. You'll strengthen family bonds when you work and play together. If you're not all together, schedule calls to check in.
- Encourage family members to plan self-care routines for themselves.
- Let your family members know how they can help you—and ask what you can do for them.

Tips for parents

Children are very observant and react to the behavior of the adults around them. When you're calm and confident, it can help your children feel less anxious. Here are some tips from the CDC for supporting children during the pandemic:

- **Take time to talk with your kids about the COVID-19 outbreak.** Let them know they can come to you if they have questions. Address their concerns and share facts in a way your children can understand.
- **Reassure your children that they are safe.** Let them know it is all right to feel upset.
- **Set a good example.** Share how you handle your own stress so your children can learn from you.
- **Pay attention to what your kids see or hear on television, on the radio, or online.** Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information can lead to anxiety.

When to get help

Worrying about the virus and how it will affect you and your loved ones is normal. However, when anxiety and stress become overwhelming, you may need help. People with pre-existing mental health conditions or substance use disorders may be particularly vulnerable. Here are common signs of distress, according to the CDC:

- Changes in appetite, energy, and activity levels
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and rashes
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

If you experience these symptoms several days in a row and they impact your ability to carry out your normal responsibilities, call your health care provider or seek help from a trained counselor.

Additional resources and numbers to call

- Call LifeSolutions for confidential counseling and support at **1-844-833-0527 (TTY:711)** or email **lifesolutions@upmc.edu**.
- Call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990. You can also text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 (TTY: 1-800-846-8517).

SOURCES

Emergency preparedness and response: Taking care of your mental health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated September 13, 2019. Accessed December 8, 2020. <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>

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