

Getting Through Corona Virus

So our introduction to 2020 begins with the anxiety of the threat of Coronavirus (COVID-19). This is flu season and far more people die from the seasonal flu. Fear seems to be rising as the days go by. Fear and anxiety about this disease can be overwhelming and result in strong emotional reactions in adults and children. The closures of schools, restaurants and bars have heightened that fear. The grocery stores running out of inventory as people panic as if a hurricane was coming doesn't help. Psychologically, we revert to what we know. During hurricane prep we buy water and non-perishable foods. Our shelves will be restocked and the food supply will not cease to be replenished. We all need to do our part. The restrictions on school attendance, frequenting restaurants and social gatherings is not because we need to fear this virus but to keep the spread from happening too quickly for our healthcare system to handle.

- Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.
- Use the down time to reconnect with family
- Get household chores done you don't normally have time for
- Organize; create systems to follow when we are all back to our hectic lives to make life easier
- Start an exercise program with your time
- Use this time to clarify values and what is most important to you and your family

Following guidelines from the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and federal, state and local government will help us get through this difficult time. Understand that even if you feel well, you could carry the virus and infect others. I have urged my patients who have elderly family members with underlying health issues to limit outside exposure. This will decrease the likelihood that they will bring it home to their elderly loved ones.

Stress and Coping

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to this virus will depend on your past experiences, your ability to manage change, the community you live in and the information to which you expose yourself. People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people, especially those with health issues who are at higher risk for complications due to COVID-19
- Some children and teens (they seem to be more concerned with the lack of social gatherings)
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have emotional issues and substance abuse issues.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating

- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSAexternal icon](#)) website.

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

Things you can do to support yourself

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- If you have been seeing a therapist, CONTINUE! Teletherapy, video or phone conferencing is available. Inform your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

For parents

Inform yourself of the facts. Children and teens will react best when parents are calm and confident. Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for 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
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

There are many things you can do to support your child

- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Explain that we need to do things for the community to keep everyone safe. Answer questions 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. Much of the information on social media, as usual, is not accurate. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

- Try to create new routines and fun activities.

For Responders:

Being in this position presents with a myriad of stressors. It can take an emotional and physical toll on you. There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress (STS) reactions:

- Have a plan in place to protect your family and inform them.
- Acknowledge that STS can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time for you and your family to recover
- Make time for self-care and activities you enjoy.
- Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.

For people who have been released from quarantine

- Being separated from others can be stressful, even if you do not get sick. Remember this is done for the welfare of all. Everyone feels differently after coming out of quarantine. 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

What to do if you get sick:

- Treat symptoms: Take ibuprofen to treat fever, drink plenty of fluids and **CALL** your healthcare provider if your symptoms worsen.
- Listen to and follow the recommendations of your medical professional
- Stay a safe distance from your family members and pets and stay in the bedroom and try not to share a bathroom if possible.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched often
- Caregivers should wear a mask if available
- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses or eating utensils, towels or bedding
- Wash hands often and cover sneezes and coughs

RESOURCES

For Everyone:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

For Communities:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4885.pdf>

Resources for Responders:

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

To help children cope with our current situation:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20857

Toll-Free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) Email: info@samhsa.hhs.gov

SAMHSA Store: <https://store.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA Hotlines

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: <https://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

Website in Spanish: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol>

SAMHSA's National Helpline

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

Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

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: <https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Website in Spanish: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol>

Treatment Locator

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Website: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator/home>

SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>