



Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

What You Should Know

When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease such as Ebola, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress—even when the outbreak affects people far from where you live and you are at low or no risk of getting sick. These signs of stress are normal, and may be more likely or pronounced in people with loved ones in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. In the wake of an infectious disease outbreak, monitor your own physical and mental health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Know how to relieve stress, and know when to get help.

Know the Signs of Stress

What follows are behavioral, physical, emotional, and cognitive responses that are all common signs of anxiety and stress. You may notice some of them after you learn about an infectious disease outbreak.

YOUR BEHAVIOR:

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your alcohol, tobacco use, or use of illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently
- Worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Know When To Get Help

You may experience serious distress when you hear about an infectious disease outbreak, even if you are at little or no risk of getting sick. If you or someone you know shows signs of stress (see list at left) for several days or weeks, get help by accessing one of the resources at the end of this tip sheet. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline right away if you or someone you know threatens to hurt or kill him- or herself or someone else, or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.



YOUR BODY:

- Having stomachaches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled

YOUR EMOTIONS:

- Being anxious or fearful
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling angry
- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Not caring about anything
- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness

YOUR THINKING:

- Having trouble remembering things
- Feeling confused
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Having difficulty making decisions

Know How To Relieve Stress

You can manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself.

KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE:

Set limits on how much time you spend reading or watching news about the outbreak. You will want to stay up to date on news of the outbreak, particularly if you have loved ones in places where many people have gotten sick. But make sure to take time away from the news to focus on things in your life that are going well and that you can control.

GET THE FACTS:

Find people and resources you can depend on for accurate health information. Learn from them about the outbreak and how you can protect yourself against illness, if you are at risk. You may turn to your family doctor, a state or local health department, U.S. government agencies, or an international organization. Check out the sidebar on the next page for links to good sources of information about infectious disease outbreaks.

KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY:

- Eat healthy foods, and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Get physical exercise.

USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO RELAX:

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, wash your face and hands, or engage in pleasurable hobbies.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities, and do a fun thing after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family.
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.



Take care of your physical health to help lower your stress. Take a break to focus on positive parts of your life, like connections with loved ones.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY, FEELINGS, AND SPIRIT:

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of thinking and feeling about this event, and think of how you handled your thoughts, emotions, and behavior around past events.
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after an event like an infectious disease outbreak, even when it does not directly threaten you.
- Connect with others who may be experiencing stress about the outbreak. Talk about your feelings about the outbreak, share reliable health information, and enjoy conversation unrelated to the outbreak, to remind yourself of the many important and positive things in your lives.
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.

Sources for Credible Outbreak-Related Health Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
<https://www.cdc.gov>

World Health Organization

Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization
525 23rd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-974-3000
<http://www.who.int/en>

Helpful Resources

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): "Hablamos" 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

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

**Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

Managing Fears and Anxiety around Coronavirus



As information about Coronavirus unfolds, there can be a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions. Below is some helpful information and resources.

Common Reactions

Please recognize that there can be a wide range of reactions and that over the next few days or weeks you may experience periods of:

- Anxiety, worry, panic
- Feeling helplessness
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating and sleeping
- Hyper-vigilance to your health and body
- Anger
- Xenophobia: fears about interacting with those who might be from Asia and guilt about these feelings

Ways to Manage Fears & Anxieties

Although Coronavirus is a health issue that is being taken very seriously by the campus and public health authorities worldwide, do not let your worry about this virus control your life. There are many simple and effective ways to manage your fears and anxieties. Many of them are essential ingredients for a healthy lifestyle; adopting them can help improve your overall emotional and physical well-being.

- **Get the facts.** Stay informed with the latest health and campus information through the health advisory at uhs.berkeley.edu/coronavirus. For further information, see the dedicated [CDC website](#).
- **Keep things in perspective.** Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage. Although you'll want to keep informed — especially if you have loved ones in affected countries — remember to take a break from watching the news and focus on the things that are positive in your life and things you have control over.
- **Be mindful of your assumptions about others.** We cannot assume that someone who appears to be of Asian descent is from China or has been exposed to the virus. Also, someone who has a cough or a fever does not necessarily have coronavirus. Self-awareness is important in not stigmatizing others in our community.
- **Stay healthy.** Adopting healthy hygienic habits such as washing your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, frequently, and certainly after sneezing or before/after touching your face or a sick person. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Avoid contact with others who are sick and stay home while sick.
- **Keep connected.** Maintaining social networks can help maintain a sense of normalcy, and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress.
- **Seek additional help.** Individuals who feel an overwhelming worry or anxiety can seek additional professional mental health support.

Episode 076: COVID-19: Dealing with Panic, Anxiety, Delirium, and Mental Health.

David Puder, M.D.



DAVID PUDER, M.D.

**PSYCHIATRY &
PSYCHOTHERAPY**

This PDF is a supplement to the podcast “Psychiatry & Psychotherapy” found on [iTunes](#), [Google Play](#), [Stitcher](#), [Overcast](#), [PlayerFM](#), [PodBean](#), [TuneIn](#), [Podtail](#), [Blubrry](#), [Podfanatic](#)

Right now is a stressful time. Schools and workplaces are shutting down. In this episode of the podcast, I wanted to cover mental health and Covid-19.

People with chronic diseases and the elderly are especially susceptible to this sickness, and all families are worried about their loved ones. Children are even feeling it as they stay home from school and are around their stressed-out parents.

It is a normal and healthy response to attachment to worry about our loved ones. We may have a worsening of our own health conditions because of the stress overall. People may be tempted to use more alcohol, drugs, or eat more. CDC article I talked about: [here](#).

Stress and anxiety are going to be very common during this time. In one study of [Wang et al. 2020](#) they found that in China, 53.8% of the respondents to a survey rated their psychological impact as moderate-to-severe and 28.8% had moderate to severe anxiety, 16.5% had moderate to severe depressive symptoms, 8.1% had moderate to severe stress levels.

“In this study, the majority of respondents spent 20–24h per day at home (84.7%), did not report any physical symptoms (60.81%), and presented with good self-rated health status (68.3%).”

“The majority of respondents (>70%) were worried about their family members contracting COVID-19, but they believed that they would survive if infected.”

Right now, there may be a higher sense of disgust around everything, so we need to be mindful in general about continuing to eat nutritious meals, if we are tempted not to eat under stress. We also need to be mindful about taking medicine that’s prescribed to us, even if we feel a sense of disgust around it. I have been giving out 90 day supplies to my patients to help them through this time.

Here are some things to consider during this time to help you:

Take a break from the news. This can be helpful for those of us who are empathic and deeply feel for the stories we are hearing.

Take a social media break. When we see other people’s worst-case scenarios, it can create the same type of stress in us. We can be aware without being overwhelmed.

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Exercise. Get your blood flowing and get the positive benefits of moving around a bit. Get on youtube and find some workout videos.

Practice deep breathing. Watch some videos and tutorials about how to use the breath to bring your body and mind back into a myelinated parasympathetic state—that rest and relaxation state.

Eat healthy. Eat as healthy as you can. People are hoarding for a six month ordeal. But, if you have it, look through your cabinet and see what you can do.

Connect with others. Call people. FaceTime people. Stay in contact with people you enjoy.

Work through the 8-day Psychiatry Podcast [Cognitive Distortion Journal](#). Our thoughts can run wild during times like this, and if we can identify the thoughts that aren't helpful or true, we can calm down more quickly.

Some cognitive distortions are:

- Overgeneralization: "I read a story of someone who died of Covid-19, therefore I will die of Covid-19."
- Jumping to conclusions—mind reading and fortune telling: "I will definitely get Covid-19. The world is heading into chaos."
- Magnification or minimization
- Emotional reasoning: "I fear, therefore we must be in great danger."

The truth is that we can't possibly know what will happen, and just because we have these thoughts pop into our mind doesn't mean it's true. Put your thoughts on trial and educate yourself with the truth. Our thoughts influence our panic, anxiety and stress levels.

Consider logotherapy as a way to find meaning. Maintain your dignity, your kindness while there is widespread panic. People will remember the kindness and attitudes, so look for some of the deeper meanings. Look for ways to be meaningful to other people and find meaning in your life.

"The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity—even under the most difficult circumstances—to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal." - Viktor Frankl

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." - Viktor Frankl

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Consider in this time going to leave a note on your neighbor's doorstep with your contact info and asking them how you might help them. What are ways you can create meaning in these times?

Why stay home?

Of course, like with any trend on the rise, there will be a peak of the virus outbreak. The goal in instituting stay at home, self quarantine, is to try and level off the statistics. If we stay at home, we can make the peak more of a hill than a sharp uprise, and we can prevent a lot of people getting sick. This gives our healthcare system a chance to be able to absorb the people who are sick and need the most acute care. Even if you're young, if you can make the effort to stay home as much as possible, you can help prevent the spread, and keep doctors' offices open for the elderly.

Look at the facts

Be aware of the actual facts:

- It's about 5% critical case scenario.
- It's about 2% lethality at the moment.

Now look at the lethality of previous pandemics:

- 50% for ebola
- MERs 30%
- SARS 10%
- Seasonal flu 0.1-0.2%

Also, with modernization of antibiotics, treatment for infections, the rate of death by infections has gone down. It isn't the most dangerous illness we've seen, but it is dangerous, especially with the smokers, elderly, and people with diabetes.

Most people don't die of infectious diseases. Most people die of inflammatory diseases. In 1926, heart disease replaced infectious disease as the number one cause of death in Massachusetts, and it is the same across the United States.

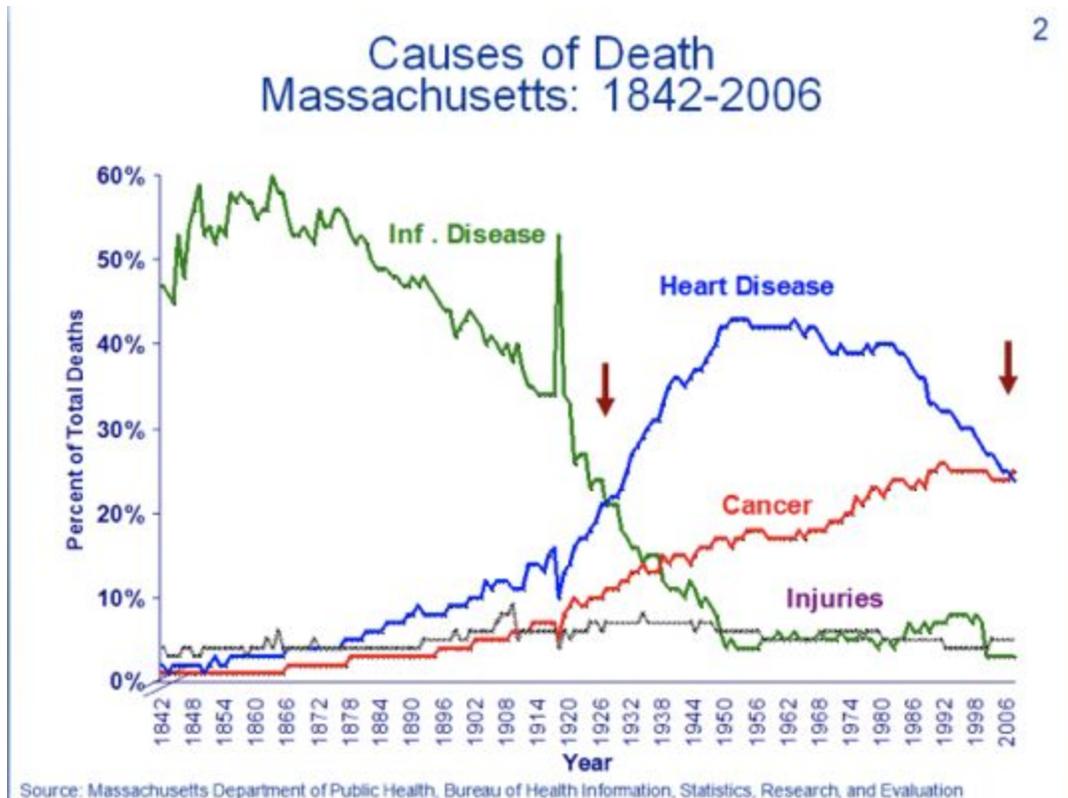
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Symptoms of Covid-19

The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.*

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

If you develop **emergency warning signs** for COVID-19 get **medical attention immediately**. Emergency warning signs include*:

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- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

For therapists continuing therapy

I think FaceTime is similar to a fax machine or telephone call in terms of [HIPPA compliance](#), because it is encrypted on both ends and not stored anywhere. If my patients want to connect with me, I will try to do that through video, with earphones, even if I have to stay home to work.

If I have a Covid-19 patient, I will pay attention specifically to their delirium—one of the symptoms of the illness. Confusion and inability to arouse could be from lack of oxygen saturation and increase in CO₂, or it could be from delirium (or all 3). In my assessments, I will test to see if they're hypoactive or hyperactive delirium. I will do this by having the people draw a clock, draw the numbers around it, and then draw times on the clock that I specify. I will ask them to spell "world" backwards, and to count backward from 21 in intervals of 3. If they do those things, they most likely will not have delirium.

If the patient is in delirium, you treat it like you'd treat other deliriums. Treat the underlying cause, and look at their medications, take off anything that's anticholinergic ([here is a list of medications that are anticholinergic and those that modify cognitive function](#)). Also, antipsychotics can help with delirium.

Also, consider if the patient has a history of trauma, and now they are experiencing anxiety on top of that. I'd consider giving short term anti-anxiety medications, but I would not consider propranolol, because I wouldn't want to put a beta blocker on someone with a respiratory issue. I might consider hydroxyzine, a low dose of seroquel or trazodone. If they're stable, I'd consider prazosin for nightmares. If they have anxiety or panic disorder and no delirium, I'd consider giving something like alprazolam, lorazepam, or clonazepam.

Always lead your sessions with empathy. Everyone is entitled to their feelings, including fear and anxiety about the state of the world.

In conclusion

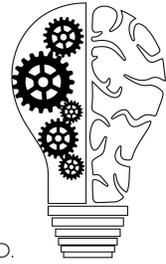
I really want to emphasize that this is a time to come together, to express gratitude and forgive. It's a time to be okay with experiencing emotion and spend some time journaling about it.

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Check out the Covid-19 Cognitive Distortion Journal. Also check my social media for things I'll be sharing about the pandemic.

Thank you for being part of my community here. I appreciate connecting with you all on social media and learning about your lives, and finding new ways to bring value to your lives and practice.



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