

Abstract

COVID-19 and your mental health

Worries and anxiety about COVID-19 and its impact can be overwhelming. Social distancing makes it even more challenging. Learn ways to cope during this pandemic.

[By Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic may have brought many changes to how you live your life, and with it, at times, uncertainty, altered daily routines, financial pressures and social isolation. You may worry about getting sick, how long the pandemic will last, whether your job will be affected and what the future will bring. Information overload, rumors and misinformation can make your life feel out of control and make it unclear what to do.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness. And mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression, can worsen.

Surveys show a major increase in the number of U.S. adults who report symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia during the pandemic, compared with surveys before the pandemic. Some people have increased their use of alcohol or drugs, thinking that can help them cope with their fears about the pandemic. In reality, using these substances can worsen anxiety and depression.

People with substance use disorders, notably those addicted to tobacco or opioids, are likely to have worse outcomes if they get COVID-19. That's because these addictions can harm lung function and weaken the immune system, causing chronic conditions such as heart disease and lung disease, which increase the risk of serious complications from COVID-19.

For all of these reasons, it's important to learn self-care strategies and get the care you need to help you cope.

Self-care strategies

Self-care strategies are good for your mental and physical health and can help you take charge of your life. Take care of your body and your mind and connect with others to benefit your mental health.

Take care of your body

Be mindful about your physical health:

- **Get enough sleep.** Go to bed and get up at the same times each day. Stick close to your typical sleep-wake schedule, even if you're staying at home.
- **Participate in regular physical activity.** Regular physical activity and exercise can help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Find an activity that inc
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- Includes movement, such as dance or exercise apps. Get outside, such as a nature trail or your own backyard.
- **Eat healthy.** Choose a well-balanced diet. Avoid loading up on junk food and refined sugar. Limit caffeine as it can aggravate stress, anxiety and sleep problems.
- **Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.** If you smoke tobacco or if you vape, you're already at higher risk of lung disease. Because COVID-19 affects the lungs, your risk increases even more. Using alcohol to try to cope can make matters worse and reduce your coping skills. Avoid taking drugs to cope, unless your doctor prescribed medications for you.
- **Limit screen time.** Turn off electronic devices for some time each day, including 30 to 60 minutes before bedtime. Make a conscious effort to spend less time in front of a screen — television, tablet, computer and phone.
- **Relax and recharge.** Set aside time for yourself. Even a few minutes of quiet time can be refreshing and help to settle your mind and reduce anxiety. Many people benefit from practices such as deep breathing, tai chi, yoga, mindfulness or meditation. Soak in a bubble bath, listen to music, or read or listen to a book — whatever helps you relax. Select a technique that works for you and practice it regularly.

Take care of your mind

Reduce stress triggers:

- **Keep your regular routine.** Maintaining a regular daily schedule is important to your mental health. In addition to sticking to a regular bedtime routine, keep consistent times for meals, bathing and getting dressed, work or study schedules, and exercise. Also set aside time for activities you enjoy. This predictability can make you feel more in control.
- **Limit exposure to news media.** Constant news about COVID-19 from all types of media can heighten fears about the disease. Limit social media that may expose you to rumors and false information. Also limit reading, hearing or watching other news, but keep up to date on national and local recommendations. Look for reliable sources, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- **Stay busy.** Healthy distractions can get you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression. Enjoy hobbies that you can do at home, such as reading a book, writing in a journal, making a craft, playing games or cooking a new meal. Or identify a new project or clean out that closet you promised you'd get to. Doing something positive to manage anxiety is a healthy coping strategy.
- **Focus on positive thoughts.** Choose to focus on the positive things in your life, instead of dwelling on how bad you feel. Consider starting each day by listing things you are thankful for. Maintain a sense of hope, work to accept changes as they occur and try to keep problems in perspective.

- **Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support.** If you draw strength from a belief system, it can bring you comfort during difficult and uncertain times.