



5 ideas to help manage stress during COVID-19

Keeping yourself and loved ones safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic may be causing you stress and anxiety. It's understandable, common and normal. Here's what you can do about it.

It's an unsettling time. Within a short period, our lives have been turned upside down. Our daily routines have been disrupted. Many of us may be out of work or financially strapped, others may be working overtime or in stressful working conditions. We have had to postpone major milestones including weddings, proms, birthdays and holidays. Living in isolation means we can't be in the presence of those closest to us, and we may be fearful for the health of our loved ones.

"It's OK to feel worried, fearful, stressed and any other strong emotions at this time," says Gina Di Giulio, Director of Mental Health at Medcan, a private health clinic. "Be kind to yourselves and recognize that this is an uncertain and uncharted time that can trigger a roller coaster of emotions. These feelings are normal."

If you're feeling uncertain or apprehensive at this time, Di Giulio suggests these five ideas for anyone looking to reduce stress during this unprecedented period of isolation:

1. Focus on the facts, not fiction

Media coverage can sometimes exacerbate a reader's or listener's anxiety. Seek out reliable and accurate sources of information.

2. Stop scrolling

In particular, you may consider reducing your use of social media, which Di Giulio says can be full of misinformation and may only fuel your nerves.

3. Seek out calm people

People who are even more worried than you are not going to help you feel better, says Di Giulio. Anxiety breeds more anxiety. If it's possible, try to minimize contact with those who may raise your anxiety levels.

4. Business as usual

As much as possible, try to maintain daily routines that connect you with colleagues, friends, and family. Di Giulio says this can help make you feel more like yourself.

5. Focus on what you can control

By focusing on the things you can control, especially those activities that also boost your health — such as daily walks or eating healthy — Di Giulio says you may reduce your fearfulness and minimize feelings of helplessness.

For many people, managing finances could be a major cause of stress during this time. “Uncertainty about household bill payments, for example, can create significant worry,” says Blake Burns, a Wealth Advisor with TD Wealth. “Getting help from a financial professional may help level the playing field and alleviate that stress. At a minimum, it is one more tool in the toolbox.”

Di Giulio also recommends finding time to engage in some healthy real-world distractions with your family or friends, even if it has to be done virtually, as well as common stress-reducing activities like sleeping and eating well. That can be as simple as cooking a meal together, playing board games, or listening to music.

“How you deal with these emotions will greatly determine how well you weather this period and how well you will come through to the other side when it is over,” says Di Giulio, while reminding us that it will indeed be over some day. “Learning how to cope with this pandemic in a healthy manner will make you stronger, more resilient and potentially a better version of yourself as compared to before it started.”

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