

COVID 19 and Stress

The COVID-19 outbreak has compounded an already existing mental health crisis in our country due to stress, affecting individuals of all ages and walks of life.

Increased stress levels are a result of social isolation, uncertainty, and the unknown which can cause fear and anxiety.

Individuals most likely to feel such stress during this health crisis are:

- Older people and those with chronic health conditions who are at higher risk for complications of the virus, feeling more worrisome.
- Children and teenagers- lack of activities and socialization with friends, including virtual schooling has led to feelings of loneliness and anxiety.
- Healthcare providers, such as doctors and nurses, and first-responders having to deal with critical medical situations day after day.
- People with existing mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.
- Individuals abusing drugs and alcohol as a means of coping.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include fear or worry about one's own health and that of others. Signs of increased stress may be changes in eating and sleep patterns, difficulty concentrating, worsening of existing chronic health conditions, and increase use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. Even dental care has been impacted by COVID-19 related stress with reports of teeth grinding, jaw issues, and headaches.

Everyone reacts differently to stress. Being able to cope with stress (in a healthy way) is essential for both physical and mental well-being. Some suggestions on how you can reduce feelings of stress include:

1. Taking a break from the news whether it be reading the newspaper, watching TV, listening to the radio, and/or social media.
2. Caring for your health with exercise and/or meditation; eating healthy meals; getting enough sleep; avoiding alcohol and drug use.
3. Keeping busy with at-home hobbies and diversional activities such as reading, sewing, knitting, crafts, puzzles and board games.
4. Outdoor activities, such as taking a walk or biking, especially on sunny days; gardening.
5. Staying connected with others through a phone call or using virtual technology such as FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom.

If stress is disrupting your activities of daily living for days in a row, contact your health care provider. When you care for yourself, you are better able to care for others.

May is National Mental Health Awareness month, signified by the color green. Wearing a green ribbon during the month of May helps show your support in letting individuals with mental health issues know you care.

Sue Schuelke, State CHE Chair

RESOURCES: Center for Disease Control [Cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
National Institute of Mental Health [Nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)
[WedMD.com](https://www.wedmd.com)