

Getting through the COVID-19 Crisis

Especially in times of significant uncertainty, it's very important to pay attention to your mental health. Here is a realistic look at what you, your loved ones, co-workers or people close to you might be feeling, and ways to help ease your minds, as we all work together to limit the spread of COVID-19.

It's OK to be concerned

You're not alone if you're worried about COVID-19. Your world is disrupted and changing quickly. Some of the most common worries are about:

- Getting sick
- Passing the virus onto others
- Being isolated from your network
- When a reliable treatment or vaccine will be available
- Adjusting to a new reality
- The health of your family and friends
- Finances
- If you have enough supplies and where to get them if you are running low

Realize what you can control

In times of crisis or uncertainty, it's helpful to focus on the things you can control and take comfort in, such as:

Your mind and body

- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise — find online workout/yoga programs
- Get enough restful sleep.
- Limit alcohol consumption if you choose to drink.
- Don't use drugs or tobacco products as a way to calm yourself if you are feeling overly stressed.

- Take only the amount of medication your doctor has prescribed.
- Maintain self-care and personal hygiene.
- Learn how to set up a telemedicine appointment with your health care professional.

Your immediate environment

- Take the time to clean your home, or organize a room.
- Work on home projects you haven't had time for previously.
- Be part of the solution to limit the disease's spread — only go out if necessary, and limit contact with others.
- Work from home if you are able to.

The information you consume

- Limit your news and information intake.
- Get updates and information from reliable sources, like the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO).
- Watch TV, movies and videos that make you feel good.
- Listen to uplifting music.
- Search for free e-books to download from your local library.
- Be watchful of worries or anxieties you may be relaying to your children.

Being prepared

- Keep a two-week supply of food on hand.
- Avoid overstocking on essential supplies others might also need.
- Watch for others in your area who may be at high risk (older, pre-existing medical condition) and ask what you can do for them.
- If you take medication, get refills and keep a two week's supply at home, if possible.

Protecting yourself and others

- Stay home if you are sick, aside from getting medical care. Contact your primary care physician to determine if an office visit is necessary or care can be provided telephonically.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with the inside of your elbow or a tissue.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, especially cell phones or remote controls.

Be aware of signs of anxiety

In times of crisis or uncertainty, it's normal to feel worried and stressed. But anxiety intensifies feelings of worry and tension. Some common symptoms include:

- Uncontrollable worry or dread
- Stomach and digestion problems
- Trouble with concentration, memory or thinking clearly
- Increased heart rate
- Changes in energy and difficulty sleeping
- Overeating or not eating at all
- Irritability and/or restlessness

In extreme cases of anxiety, people might experience a panic attack. Panic attacks usually go away when people are able to talk to someone else to calm their fears, and/or they practice deep breathing. Seek medical attention if symptoms persist.

Manage feelings of anxiety

In times of crisis or uncertainty, including while practicing social distancing or self-quarantine, people can do many things to help reduce feelings of anxiety, including:

- Take 10 deep breaths.
- Exercise.
- Take a relaxing bath or shower if that is calming for you.
- Get a support buddy, and call, message or video chat as needed.
- Use resources like support groups or Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 74141).
- Use a mindfulness or meditation app.
- Set a timer to remind you to get up and stretch or take a walk.
- Create a new routine.

Seek additional help and resources

If you're taking steps to manage worry and anxiety, and they don't seem to be helping, here are some additional resources you can take advantage of during this COVID-19 crisis and in other times of need:

Mental health screening

If you feel like you are struggling with your mental health, get a free, private and anonymous screening at: mhascreening.org. Based on your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start feeling better.

Crisis hotlines and textlines

If you experiencing emotional distress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, crisis counselors are available every day, all day:

Call 1-800-985-5990

Text TalkWithUs to 66746

If you are in crisis or thinking about suicide, get in touch with someone immediately:

Call 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

Text MHA to 741741

For more information about mental health, visit: Psychhub.com/selfcare

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/index.html>. Accessed March 25, 2020.

Mental Health America: COVID-19 and Your Mental Health Infographic: <https://www.mhanational.org/mental-health-month>. Accessed March 25, 2020.

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