

Coping With Stress and Social Distancing During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak

A disease outbreak can be stressful, especially one in which we all need to closely monitor our health, stay home as much as possible and avoid all unnecessary social (physical) interactions with others. Social distancing and isolation are likely to disrupt your work, your family life, the way you do things and the way you interact with others. This can all add to the stress of the situation. Feeling overwhelmed, sad, anxious or afraid, or experiencing other symptoms of distress, such as trouble sleeping, is natural. You can reduce the negative impact of stress by anticipating normal reactions, practicing stress-reducing activities and seeking help.

Know What to Expect

Stress can affect the way you think, feel and act. Most of the effects are normal reactions to distressing events and are generally short-lived. Here are some of the effects and symptoms you may experience:

- Physical effects: fatigue, exhaustion, headaches, rapid heartbeat or exacerbation (aggravation, increase, worsening) of preexisting medical conditions
- Emotional effects: feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, agitation or irritability
- Mental effects: confusion, forgetfulness, or difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Behavioral effects: experiencing uncharacteristic behaviors such as becoming restless, argumentative or short-tempered, or changes in eating and sleeping patterns

Stay Informed

Use credible sources of information about the disease outbreak to stay up to date on what is happening, understand the risks and know how to best protect yourself. Avoid sharing unconfirmed news or acting on rumors, as this adds to misinformation, fear and panic. For information about COVID-19, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus or cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Limit Screen Time and Exposure to Media

Too much time on the phone or computer, or watching or listening to news reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week, can increase your anxiety and fear. Seek updates and guidance two or three times per day.

Keep Connected and Reach Out

Stay connected with family, friends and your social networks using communications such as email, social media, video conference, telephone, FaceTime or Skype. Consider calling a neighbor or older adults and people who live alone that you know to see how they are doing and show you care.

Maintain Daily Routines

Keeping routines gives us sense of control and can reduce anxiety. Try as much as possible to keep daily routines or create new ones, if needed, to help you cope with the changes.

Stay Positive

Focus on things you are grateful for and things that are going well in your life. Get courage and inspiration from positive stories of people who are finding ways to cope and remain strong.

Be Proactive About Your Basic Needs and Financial Stressors

Advocate for yourself to make sure you have what you need, such as food and medication, to be safe and comfortable. If you are unable to work, contact your employer and discuss any options for leave. Contact companies that send you monthly bills and request different payment arrangements. Call **311** or visit NYC 311's [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and City Life](#) web page for additional available resources.

Be Thoughtful and Sensitive

Avoid assumptions and blame about who has the disease because of the way they look or where they or their families are from. There is no connection between race/ethnicity and infectious diseases. Speak up when you hear false rumors or negative stereotypes that encourage or promote racism and xenophobia. If you are being harassed due to your race, nation of origin or other identities, call **311** or visit the NYC Commission on Human Rights website and [file a complaint online](#).

Seek Help

An infectious disease outbreak such as COVID-19 can be stressful for you, your loved ones and your friends. As mentioned, it is natural to feel overwhelmed, sad, anxious and afraid, or to experience other symptoms of distress, such as trouble sleeping. To lower your stress and manage the situation:

- Try to stay positive
- Remind yourself of your strengths
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones
- Use healthy coping skills

NYC Well

If symptoms of stress become overwhelming for you, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope.

NYC Well staff are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. For support, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or [chat online](#).

You can also visit nyc.gov/nycwell and click on their [App Library](#) to find apps and online tools to help you manage your health and emotional well-being from home.