

Coronavirus – Managing Stress and Anxiety

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disaster can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress can make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.

Stress and Coping;

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations - Responding to the outbreak depends on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.

It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during and after a disaster. Everyone reacts differently, and your own feelings will change over time. Notice and accept how you feel, taking care of your emotional health during a disaster will help you think clearly and react to the urgent needs to protect yourself and your family. Self-care will also help your long-term healing.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include;

- Feelings of numbness, disbelief, anxiety
- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating, upsetting thoughts and images
- Changes in appetite, energy, and activity levels
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes
- Anger or short-temper
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

Things you can do to support yourself;

- **Take care of your body** - eat healthy well-balanced meals, learn new cooking skills, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- **Connect with others** - share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships, and build a strong support system.
- **Take breaks** - make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade; try taking in deep breaths; try to do activities you usually enjoy.
- **Stay informed**– when you feel that you are missing information, you may become more stressed or nervous. Watch, listen to, or read the news for updates from officials and reliable sources only – rumours rumble in a crisis on social media.

FACT - for most people, the immediate risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to be low;

Older people and people of any age with underlying health conditions, such as diabetes, lung disease, or heart disease, are at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19

- **Avoid too much exposure to news** - take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do enjoyable activities and return to normal life as much as possible and check for updates between breaks.
- **Seek help when needed** - if distress impacts activities in your daily life for several days/weeks, talk to someone, contact your doctor, speak to a friend or family

Reduce stress in yourself and others

Sharing the facts about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful - ensure you focus on the accurate information which can help make people feel less stressed.

As a Parent

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include;

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they've outgrown (for example, toilet accidents, bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and "acting out" behaviors in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

There are many things you can do to support your child;

- Take time to talk with your child about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand
- Reassure your child that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share how you deal with your own stress, they can learn how to cope from you
- Limit your family's exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand
- Try to keep up with regular routines - where schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities
- Be a role model - take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members

FACT - you can help stop COVID-19 by knowing the signs and symptoms;

- Fever and high temperature; Cough; Shortness of breath

Have you been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19?

Visit online [**NHS 111**](#) or Call them on 111 if your symptoms worsen.

Responding to COVID-19

Responding to disasters, and COVID-19 in particular, is both rewarding and challenging work, and will certainly take an emotional toll. Sources of stress for responders include intense workloads, life-and-death decisions, personal risk and separation from family. Stress prevention and management is critical for those to stay well and to continue to help in the situation. There are important steps you should take before, during, and after an event. To take care of others, ensure you're feeling well and thinking clearly to keep on top of things;

- Try to learn as much as possible about what your role is through this
- If you are travelling or working long hours, explain this to loved ones who may want to contact you. Come up with ways you may be able to communicate with them. Keep their expectations realistic, and take the pressure off yourself.
- Talk to your supervisor and establish a plan for who will fill any urgent ongoing work duties unrelated to the disaster while you are engaged in the response.

Understand and Identify Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress

Limit your time working alone by trying to work in teams, conference calls, online skype, remote tools etc.

We all experience stress during a crisis and when stress builds up it can cause:

- Burnout – feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed
- Secondary traumatic stress – stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event

Coping techniques like taking breaks, eating healthy foods, exercising, and using a buddy system can help prevent and reduce burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Recognise the signs of both of these conditions in yourself and other responders to be sure those who need a break or need help can address these needs.

Signs of Burnout	Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness, depression, or apathy • Easily frustrated • Blaming of others, irritability • Lacking feelings, indifferent • Isolation or disconnection from others • Poor self-care (hygiene) • Tired, exhausted or overwhelmed • Feeling like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A failure ○ Nothing you can do will help ○ You are not doing your job well ○ You need alcohol/other drugs to cope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessively worry or fear about something bad happening • Easily startled, or "on guard" all of the time • Physical signs of stress (e.g. racing heart) • Nightmares or recurrent thoughts about the traumatic situation • The feeling that others' trauma is yours

FACT - diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity;

Fear and anxiety about COVID-19 can cause people to avoid or reject others even though they are not at risk for spreading the virus.

Self-Care Technique - Anxiety UK suggests practising the "Apple" technique to deal with anxiety and worries;

- **Acknowledge** - notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind
- **Pause** - don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all - pause and breathe
- **Pull back** - tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.
- **Let go** - let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.
- **Explore** - explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention.

It is important to remind yourself:

- It is not selfish to take breaks
- The needs of everyone else are more important than your own needs and well-being
- Working constantly does not mean you will make your best contribution
- There are other people who can help

Responding to disasters can be both rewarding and stressful. Knowing that you have stress and coping with it as you respond will help you stay well, and this will allow you to keep helping those around you.

People who have been released from Isolation;

Being separated from others when you may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be stressful, even if you do not get sick - everyone feels differently after coming out of quarantine. Some feelings include:

- Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine
- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine
- Other emotional or mental health changes

FACT - Someone who has completed quarantine or has been released from isolation does not pose a risk of infection to other people;

This is the best news for everyone, and the situation is evolving continuously – keep ahead of the news, from local government.

Keep Healthy and Alert

For some people self-isolation can be boring or frustrating. You may find your mood and feelings being affected and you may feel low, worried or have problems sleeping.

There are simple things you can do that may help, such as staying in touch with friends and relatives or work colleagues on the phone, by facetime or other social media to talk to them about how you feel, your situation etc.

Read a book, an audiobook or take some time to de-stress by meditating for at least 10 minutes in a quiet place.

Carry out a Mood Self-Assessment – [click here](#)

Listen to some Mental Wellbeing Audio Guides – [click here](#)

Stress Management advice – [click here](#)

Keep Active – for ideas and more information [click here](#)

Eat a balance diet – [click here](#)

If you are experiencing feelings of distress and isolation, or are struggling to cope, The Samaritans offers support; you can speak to someone for free over the phone, in confidence, on 116 123 (UK and ROI), email jo@samaritans.org, or visit the Samaritans website to find details of your nearest branch <https://www.samaritans.org/>

For services local to you, the national mental health database Hub of Hope allows you to enter your postcode to search for organisations and charities who offer mental health advice and support in your area <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>

Additional Sources of information and support;

APPS	Staying Alive – Suicide prevention
	Big White Wall – An online community for people who are stressed, anxious or feeling low
	Calm Harm – Designed for self-harm prevention
	Calm – Meditation App

VIDEOS	The Black Dog video about Depression
	Brene Brown – Empathy vs Sympathy – A short video to explain the difference between sympathy and empathy
	A Mark Henick video about suicide and recovery
	The Stress Container guidance video
PODCASTS	Dr Heather McKee – Bite Sized Habits
	Dr Chatterjee – The Stress Solution
	The School of Life - YT
	Michelle Quaid – make positive psychology work
	And some others to look at are HERE
ONLINE RESOURCE	Action for Happiness – Events and resources to support wellbeing in London
	Headtalks – A range of videos of people who have experienced mental ill-health & their tips
	Food for the Brain – Details about nutrition for better mental health
	Big White Wall – An online support service
	Heads Meds – Information on mental health medication
	Drinkaware – A website to track your alcohol consumption. Also offers an on line chat service to help you manage your own drinking or support those around you
	Liz Atkin – The tube artist “compulsive charcoal”
	The School of Life – run courses, workshops and talks all year as well as having some great books
	Awareness is Freedom – on line mindfulness and wellbeing practices
READING	Mindfulness: A Practical Guide To Finding Peace In A Frantic World by Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman
	The Chimp Paradox by Professor Steve Peters
	The Stranger on the Bridge : My journey from suicidal despair to hope by Jonny Benjamin
	Reasons to Stay Alive by Matt Haig

Notes on a Nervous Planet by Matt Haig
Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl
Cure: A journey into the science of mind over body by Jo Marchant
Rewire your Anxious Brain by Catherine Pittman and Elizabeth Carle
Learned Optimism ; How to change your mind and your life by Martin Seligman
Finding Hope in the Age of Anxiety by Clare Hayes
Get out of Your Mind & Into Your Life by Steven Hayes (Acceptance & Commitment workbook)
The Inflamed Mind : A Radical New Approach To Depression by Edward Bullmore
The Shallows: How the internet us changing how we think , read and remember by Nicholas Carr
Good Reasons for Bad Feelings by Randolph Nesse

**For further information contact the
[BPIF Health & Safety Team](#)**

STOP ● THINK II ACT ►
YOUR SAFETY IS OUR PRIORITY

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