

Managing the stress of coronavirus

Everybody gets stressed out sometimes. But the unfolding coronavirus pandemic is something altogether new, and likely to linger for weeks.

Stress is unpleasant, but if prolonged it also can have a serious impact on physical health, causing symptoms from nausea and headache to insomnia, shortness of breath and increased heart rate. It can even lead to worsening of chronic health conditions.

There are many ways to try to combat stress—some big, some small. To mitigate the stress you may be feeling, try some of these tips.



There are many ways, big and small, to combat stress

Stay informed, but not too informed

It's important to stay informed on the latest coronavirus developments, so pick two or three news sources you trust and check in with them regularly. Make sure one of them is local, since national media can't keep up with every development at the local level.

Consider limiting your exposure to social media, which is flooded with the anxieties of all your friends. Check in once or twice a day, but try not to over-do it.

This philosophy holds true for financial and economic news as well. If you have a well-defined investing plan targeted to your individual goals and financial situation, you can focus on the long-term instead of getting stressed out by day-to-day market fluctuation.

Take control in small ways

It may be difficult to focus on taking care of yourself when the things you worry about are so far out of your control. So, try to take control in small ways:

- It may not seem like it, but there actually are a lot of things you can control in this crisis. The best ways to avoid getting sick are all completely under your control: wash your hands; try to keep your hands away from your face; cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze; maintain that social distance; and clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.
- Be mindful of your choices. If you're working from home, it's easy to wander to the fridge every time you have a spare moment. Taking a minute to pause and be aware of the choices you make at stressful times can help you take better care of yourself — and feel more in control.
- Cook and eat as healthfully as you can. It can be comforting not only to take care of yourself, but your family as well.

- Exercise can be a great stress reliever, and so can getting outdoors. Most of us, even those who are under orders to shelter in place, have the option to go outside for a walk or run, as long as we continue to keep our distance from others. Take advantage of that. And while you're outside, try to stay in the moment; feel the sun on your skin and the breeze in your hair. Breathe it all in. Revel in the goodness.
- Consider video workouts as well. Many gyms and trainers are streaming free daily workouts now.



Reach out to others

Personal relationships are incredibly important to mental health, and that makes social distancing especially difficult.

- Don't just text your friends. Call and talk to them, and use video if you can.
- Contact neighbors who are older or alone and find out if they need anything. Perhaps you can make a run to the grocery store for them or pick up their take-out dinner.
- People are endlessly creative, and it's really showing up in how they interact socially when they have to keep at a distance. Artists have been hosting online tutorials; musicians have been performing live from their kitchens; and companies have hosted virtual dance parties. Virtual happy hour also is suddenly a thing. Be creative; there are lots of ways to find community online.



Be cool, calm, collected

It really pays to be emotionally resilient in periods of high stress and anxiety. Resilient people tend to be optimistic and calm and have a sense of purpose in their life, but even they are feeling stressed during this time. If these qualities don't come naturally to you, you may be able to nurture them or seek out people and places where it's easier to do:

- Remind yourself of what matters most to you. Practice gratitude for all the good stuff.
- Breathe. Yes, it can be that simple. Inhale and exhale slowly, focusing on your breath. If you have more time, consider trying mindfulness meditation.
- Lower your standards! This is a tough time for everyone. You won't be perfect. You might snap at your family or get distracted from work. If you expect perfection, you will never be satisfied—and will always be stressed. So give yourself a break.
- Avoid too much negativity. We're all stressed out right now, but you can limit how much you talk about it, and how much you listen.
- Be forgiving. Everyone is dealing with a lot of emotions — their own and, in many cases, their children's — and reactions can be raw.

When to seek help

The stress you're experiencing isn't all in your head. It's very real. If you find it impacting your health or relationships, or you've tried to tamp it down without success, consider calling your doctor.

You may also be able to use a telemedicine tool through your employer benefits or contact your Employee Assistance Program for help.

