

Coping Strategies for COVID-19 Stress

During times of crisis, many people experience feelings of stress. This is especially true for public health, health care, and other essential workers that care for our communities. You may be experiencing short-term, acute stress related to the current crisis and an atypical workload, or long-term, chronic stress. There are many options for combating the effects of stress. **Start with some of the suggestions in this guide to find what works for you.**

Start with Breathing Techniques

A popular option is the 4-7-8 breathing technique, which consciously slows your breathing. Start with a slow, deep breath, inhaling as you count to 4. Hold that breath for a count of 7 before exhaling while counting to 8. Repeat as needed.

Try these breathing techniques from the [University of Michigan](#) or [Greatist.com](#).

Other techniques you can use on the spot include cognitive reframing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation. The following resources provide more information about these approaches to mindfulness:

- [VeryWellMind.com](#)
- [Shine](#)
- [Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#)
- [Healthline](#)

Chronic Stress

When stress lasts long after a time of crisis you may want to consider additional emotional well-being techniques. Yale offers a course, [The Science of Well-being](#), that includes stress relief and well-being practices you can incorporate into your daily life.



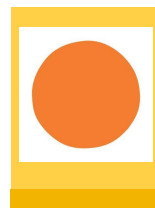
Stress-Relief Resources

Outside of traditional coping strategies, advances in technology and our use of smartphones means more resources are readily available. Check out these stress-relief apps and other technologies designed to help you stay connected - click the logo boxes to learn more.



Calm App

Bring joy, clarity, and peace to your daily life by focusing on meditation, breathing, sleep, and relaxation.



HeadSpace

Mindfulness and meditation to help you perform at your best every day.



Moodpath

A pocket-sized mental health companion designed to support you through rough patches and more.



Sanvello

Use a supportive community, along with a toolbox, to better deal with stress and anxiety.



Happify

Overcome negative thoughts and build resilience with help regaining control of your thoughts and feelings.



SuperBetter

Increase your resilience with a game focused on optimism and motivation in the face of adversity.

When it comes to visiting with family and friends, consider one of these video meeting options to stay connected during social distancing:

- [Cisco Webex Meetings](#)
- [Google Hangouts](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [Zoom](#)

Public Health Responder Care

Public health practitioners today work in fast-paced, rapidly changing environments. On top of normal duties to prevent disease, promote health, and protect the public, they need to communicate effectively and compassionately during a time of crisis, as well as collect, document, and disseminate data. If you or a loved one are experiencing signs of burnout or secondary traumatic stress, the CDC reminds us of proper coping mechanisms, including the importance of self-care and seeking help when you need it.

Signs of Burnout

- 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:
 - A failure
 - Nothing you do will help
 - You are not doing your job well
 - You need alcohol/other drugs to cope

Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Excessive 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 recurring thoughts about the situation
- Feeling someone else’s trauma as your own



“Responding to disasters can be both rewarding and stressful.

Knowing your stress and coping with it as you respond will help you stay well, allowing you to keep helping those who are affected.”

Self-care Techniques

- Limit working hours to 12-hour shifts
- Limit solo working time and use a Buddy System:
 - Set up check-ins with each other
 - Listen carefully; share experiences and feelings
 - Acknowledge tough situations and recognize even the smallest accomplishments
- Write in a journal
- Talk to family, friends, and colleagues
- Practice breathing and relaxation techniques
- Maintain a healthy diet, sleep, and exercise regimen; limit alcohol and caffeine
- Create a menu of self-care activities that you enjoy (e.g. reading, exercising)

Important Reminders

- Boundaries are okay and you can say “no”
- Breaks are not selfish
- Needs of survivors don’t outweigh your own
- Working constantly does not mean you are making your best contribution
- You are not the only one who can help



Working from Home

Working from home is a new normal for many professionals. No matter your home situation, working outside of the office can present challenges to maintaining your regular productivity levels. Keep a healthy work-life balance and stable work environment with these tips.

Maintain a Regular Routine^{2,3,4}

Preserve a sense of order and purpose with clear guidelines on your work-life balance. Following a work plan can help your family adjust to a different home environment too.

Take Breaks^{1,2}

Breaks are important - we perform better when there are periods of high activity, low activity, and rest. Try scheduling a “mental commute” before and after your work hours, and aim to take a brief break every 75 to 90 minutes. Including regular daily activities without screens can increase productivity.

Designate a Workspace^{1,2,5}

Your brain associates where you work with working, so designating a single location makes it easier to focus on the task at hand. Avoid working in bed as it can make you sleepy. It's a good idea to treat your bedroom as a sacred space for sleep and relaxation. Ideally, find a quiet corner and try using headphones with music or white noise to avoid distractions.

Set Boundaries^{1,2}

Friends and family may not understand your need for solitude when working from home. Create some boundaries and share your schedule with them so they understand that you're working when you're at your computer. Putting a sign on the door to your home workspace or asking them not to disturb you unless it's an emergency can also help lessen your interruptions throughout the day.

Sources:

1. [CNET: How to Stay Sane and Productive when Working from Home](#)
2. [PCMag: 20 Tips for Working from Home](#)
3. [APA: Keeping Your Distance to Stay Safe](#)
4. [The NY Times: I Spent a Year in Space, and I Have Tips on Isolation to Share](#)
5. [Business Insider: 3 Tips for a Home Workspace](#)

Working from Home

Get Outside^{2,3}

Research has shown that spending time in nature is beneficial for our mental and physical health, as is exercise. It doesn't have to be a long workout, but exercising once a day should be part of your quarantine schedule (just stay at least six feet away from others).

Find a Hobby⁴

Finding a creative outlet that works for you can lessen stress, especially if you are confined to a single space. Something as simple as reading a book can work wonders for making you feel better, and some local bookstores now offer curbside pickup or home delivery, as do craft and hobby stores. It's a great way to support local business too.

Keep a Journal⁴

Writing in a journal is valuable, even if it's simply chronicling the days' events. Try describing your experiences through your five senses to help put things in perspective. It also gives you the opportunity to reflect on this unique time in history when life has returned to normal. A fun twist is a daily gratitude journal recording things you are grateful for throughout the day.

Avoid Total Social Isolation^{1,2,3,4}

One of the most challenging things about working from home is the lack of socialization. Make time to connect with others, whether that means video chatting colleague(s) or virtual dinner plans with a friend.

COVID-19 App Resources

<u>Down Dog Fitness</u>	<u>Free Streaming Sites</u>	<u>Stop, Breathe & Think</u>
<u>Fitness Blender</u>	<u>Free Book Downloads</u>	<u>The Breathing App - iOS</u>
<u>DoYogaWithMe</u>	<u>UCLA Mindful App</u>	<u>Insight Timer</u>
<u>Yoga with Adriene</u>	<u>Free Self-Compassion Meditation Sessions</u>	<u>Smiling Mind</u>

Taking Care of Yourself

Whatever stress you may be facing, the best thing you can do is take care of yourself. [Coping Tips](#) and [Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event](#) are two robust resources from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Establish and Maintain a Routine

Schedule meals at regular times and put yourself on a sleep schedule to ensure you're getting enough rest. Incorporate fun, positive activity into your schedule, as well as exercise.

Eat a Healthy Diet & Get Enough Sleep

Focus on a well-rounded, nutritional diet and avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Reduce insomnia by going to bed only when you are ready to sleep and avoiding screens, alcohol, and caffeine before and in bed. If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try journaling to clear your mind.

Regular Exercise

[Desk exercises](#) can be done throughout the day, or you can set aside time for taking a walk, stretching, or practicing deep breathing techniques. Make a pact with yourself:

I will _____ (walk, yoga, meditate) at _____ (time) for _____ (how long?)

Limit Consumption of News

Constant attention to news stories about a disaster or traumatic event can increase stress and anxiety. Reduce the amount of news you take in and engage in relaxing activities to help you heal.

Take Deep Breaths & Listen to Music

Deep breathing can move stress out of your body, help you to calm yourself, and can even stop a panic attack. Couple it with music as a way to help your body relax naturally. Create a relaxing playlist and listen to it often.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS - Available 24/7

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	1-800-273-TALK (8255)
National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-7233 or Text LOVEIS to 22522
Disaster Distress Helpline	1-800-985-5990 or Text TalkWithUs to 66746