

# COPING WITH STRESS DURING COVID-19

Most people are having stress about this virus. When we are stressed, it is normal to feel different. Stress can change how we feel, how we think, and how we act. These changes may be surprising at first, but they are normal. Any of us can go through them. Each person's stress response will be unique. These changes often last for many weeks and may involve:

## **Emotional Changes.**

### **You might feel**

- Nervous, afraid, or overwhelmed
- Sad or tearful
- Frustrated or angry
- Guilty, even if you haven't done any thing to feel guilty about
- Numb. Not caring about the things you often care about

## **Physical Changes.**

### **You might feel**

- Tense, not be able to relax
- Shaky, jumpy, or easily startled
- Not hungry, or hungry all the time

## **Spiritual Changes**

- Questioning religious or spiritual beliefs
- Feeling angry at God or a higher power
- Loss of meaning, feeling like nothing matters

## **Changes in Thinking**

- Trouble controlling how much time you spend thinking about COVID-19
- Worrying a lot about your safety or other people's safety
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Trouble remembering things.
- Having disturbing dreams.

## **Changes in Behavior**

- Spend a lot of time reading news or social media
- Trouble falling asleep or not sleeping through the night
- Sleeping too much, not getting out of bed during the day
- Not being able to sit still
- Anger outbursts

Most often, these changes lessen or go away once stress goes down. You might notice that these changes carry on for a while. Since we don't know how long the virus will last, we can't say exactly when you will feel less stressed. We are here. You are not alone. We want to help you handle your stress. We want to make sure you ask for help if you need it.

## Healthy ways to cope with stress

- **Connect with others.** Find ways to stay connected to other people, even when you are staying home. If you can't connect in person, call, text, or email to stay in touch. You might also want to try video chat. Things like FaceTime, Google Chat, or Zoom are easy to use.
- **Connect with yourself.** Our bodies store tension for us. Notice where you carry tension within your body. The neck, shoulders, and low back are common places to hold stress. Do stretching, yoga, or Tai Chi. Help calm your body. Let go of stress in your body. A hot shower or bath can also help to relax your body.
- **Take care of yourself.** Be sure to eat healthy meals at normal times each day. Drink enough water to stay hydrated. Get enough sleep/rest. Take meds as instructed.
- **Stay active.** Find ways to stay active. It helps to do things that don't need a lot of focus. Do things like: exercise, listen to music, read, write, or journal. Draw, sketch or paint. Knit, craft, or do a puzzle. Play board, card, videogames or watch TV or movies.
- **Calm your nervous system.** When you notice yourself feeling tense, take a few deep breaths and pay special attention to breathing out. Be sure to use your diaphragm. When breathing out, slightly sighing can add to the relaxation. Meditate or practice mindfulness.
- **Find a reason to laugh.** Laughter eases stress and releases "feel good hormones" called endorphins. So watch a funny movie or tell a joke.
- **Take a break.** If you're reading a lot of news or social media, think about taking a break. Limiting the amount of news you are taking in can be helpful.
- **Connect with nature.** Taking a walk outside. Connecting with nature can calm you and inspire wonder.
- **Keep your routine as normal as possible.** Find ways to keep as close to your normal schedule as you can. Stick to your bedtime and getting up time. Eat your meals at regular times.
- **Spiritual wellness.** Reflect on your core values. Look for the blessings or positives within this stressful time. Practice listing 3 or 4 things you are grateful for each day. Keep up with your spiritual practice if you have one. Look for ways to connect online with a faith community.
- **Look up!** The act of looking upwards can lift your mind and lift your spirit. This is especially true if you look at the sky.
- **Remind yourself.** Remember that you are a human being going through a stressful situation. It may take you some time to figure out the best ways to cope. Give yourself time to figure it out. Remind yourself that you are not alone, even if you feel alone right now. Remember that "this too shall pass."

## Actions to Avoid

Stress can cause us to do things that don't help.

- Don't use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Don't isolate yourself from people who can help

## If You Need More Help

Call your health care provider if you need more help. Your provider can suggest how to handle stress differently. Your provider might give medication. They might send you to a mental health expert, especially if you are struggling.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Crisis Text Line: text MN to 741741**

## Call for help if you are

- Thinking about hurting yourself
- Wanting to hurt others
- Feeling like you can't take care of yourself
- Drinking or using drugs more than usual
- If you are in immediate danger, call 911 OR
- Go to Acute Psychiatric Services (APS). This at HCMC. It is right next to the ER.