

Coping with Stress during COVID-19

UR Medicine Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The recent outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) is already causing significant disruption in our daily lives and routines. The stress and anxiety that come with the fluid nature of the ever-evolving events, and the uncertainty associated with them, can be very challenging to manage. These are difficult times for everyone, and it is important to recognize that each person will react differently to the stress of the situation. This is not a matter of strength or weakness. How each of you reacts to stressful events is based on your background, the things that make you different from other people, your set of beliefs, your community, and your level of support.

The situation is changing rapidly, and the heightened media attention can add to the fear and anxiety that you may already be experiencing. You hear directives asking you to practice social distancing, stay home whenever possible, wash your hands frequently, and take additional precautions that can easily be perceived as drastic and therefore alarming. These measures can also be very disruptive, especially if you have children in the home. Being asked to work from home is another novelty with which many are unfamiliar. Even though we hear that the virus does not affect children in the same way as our elderly, fear extends to adults and children alike. Effectively managing stress and anxiety during these difficult times will be helpful to you and your family.

Some level of stress and anxiety is normal and even expected during difficult times. However, toxic stress and undue panic is never helpful, and it is important to be mindful of its warning signs. Anxiety is very common, and anyone can be affected by it. If you are worried about the situation, feel nervous, on edge, or occasionally fear the worst, that is likely to be normal. On the other hand, if you start having frequent anxiety attacks, are unable to sleep at night, or if you find yourself being angry and irritable with others, your level of anxiety is starting to interfere with your daily life and you need to address it somehow.

Tips for addressing COVID-19 anxiety:

1. Limit exposure to news and social media

Of course, this cannot be an all or nothing situation. Some level of information is necessary to keep you and your family informed. However, constantly checking the news and sensationalized stories on social media is never helpful, as you would be exposing yourself to a constant stream of the collective fears of others.

2. Create a new routine for yourself and family

School closings, telework, social distancing and the avoidance of crowds or public places are only a partial list of the new living reality we all need to adjust to over the coming weeks until our health officials are convinced that the spread of the virus is under better control. These new realities cause significant disruption in our daily routine. Our daily schedules add a sense of predictability and therefore some comfort to our lives. Disrupting this routine can be anxiety provoking to some more than others. One way to manage such anxiety is to create a new routine and a new schedule with daily activities for yourself and your family; embrace the new reality and use it to catch up on much needed family time. You can find helpful information and additional tips on [managing anxiety and stress from COVID-19 on the CDC website](#).

3. Maintain your connection with others

Use phone contact and video chat to connect with others on a regular basis. Try to avoid commenting on news reports and headlines. Instead, reach out for support and share with each other tips on what has been helpful to you that may also help your friends, your colleagues or your loved ones.

4. Address the anxiety of the children in your home

Although children seem to be less affected by the COVID-19 virus, they can be vulnerable to the stress and anxiety present around them. Schools are closed and children no longer have access to their friends. Their routine has been upended as well. They will have questions that need answered in a simple and factual manner. Refer to the [COVID-19 CDC webpage for further information](#).

5. Use anxiety relieving and distraction strategies

Some suggestions include:

- listening to music
- watching your favorite show
- reading that book that you never had the time to start
- create a daily exercise routine that can be done at home

You may also wish to try one of the mindfulness apps available on line such as [headspace](#) or [calm](#). Of course, each one of you know of strategies that have helped you during times of stress and it would be important to use those.

As the next few weeks may bring more changes, UR Medicine EAP remains a resource for you and your families and we take pride in the community we built together. We would like you to know that we are here to support you and your family members. Our team at UR Medicine EAP began providing telephone and telehealth services long before “social distancing” was necessary so we are ready to “see” you even if you do not feel comfortable coming to the office. Please call us at 585-276-9110 for more information or to schedule an appointment. Our services are free and confidential.