

Managing Stress During the COVID-19 Outbreak

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What is Stress?

Stress is...

- Tension felt when faced with a new, unpleasant or threatening situation.
- An automatic physical reaction.
- An emotion that can be controlled and managed with practice.

Managing Stress

A major difference between those who feel overwhelmed by stress and those who do not is not the presence or absence of stress, but the ability to recognize stress when it occurs and to manage it.

Signs of Stress

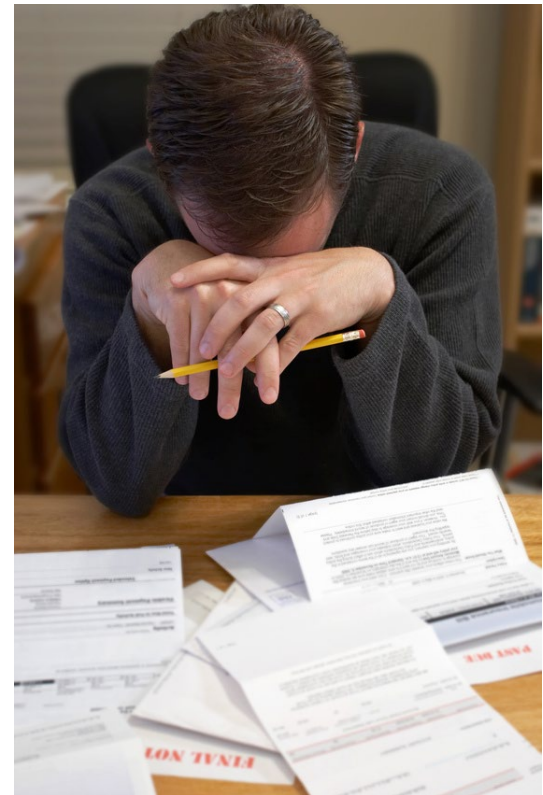
- Over-stress reactions include a wide range of symptoms that can manifest through the following types of signs:
 - physical
 - emotional
 - behavioral
 - cognitive (thought process)

Physical Symptoms

Perspiration/sweaty hands	Indigestion/vomiting
Increased heart beat	Butterflies in stomach
Trembling	Headaches
Nervous ticks	Sleeping problems
Dryness of throat and mouth	Pain in the neck or lower back
Tiring easily	Loss of appetite or overeating
Sleeplessness	Susceptibility to illness

Feelings

- Moodiness
- Anxiety
- Irritability or hostility
- Fearfulness



Behaviors

- Crying for no apparent reason
- Acting impulsively
- Grinding your teeth
- Increasing smoking
- Increasing use of drugs and alcohol
- Losing your appetite or overeating

Thoughts

- Inability to concentrate or focus
- Worrying about the future
- Preoccupation with thoughts/tasks
- Forgetfulness

Stress Specifically Related to COVID-19 Outbreak

The COVID-19 outbreak has created a great deal of anxiety, fear and uncertainty:

- Fear of getting sick and anxiety regarding at-risk family members
- Food instability
- Financial hardships due to layoffs and economic downturn

Stress Specifically Related to COVID-19 Outbreak

- Fear of losing health insurance due to changes in employment status
- Adjusting to working from home or online coursework
- Feelings of isolation due to separation from coworkers and classmates

Common Reactions

- Feeling helpless or confused
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety, panic and/or depression
- Anger
- Denial or bravado (“this can’t impact me”)
- Overexposure to media and social media
- Hyper-vigilance regarding personal hygiene and health
- Hoarding groceries and cleaning supplies
- Grief

Tips for Managing COVID-19 Stress

- Obtain accurate information: Stay informed but be sure to get information from reliable sources. There is plenty of misinformation and conflicting news circulating that can increase feelings of anxiety and depression. The following are some reliable sources of current information:
 - New York State Department of Health: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home>
 - The World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease>
 - COVID-19 Resources of SUNY Orange website: <https://sunyorange.edu/covid-19/index.htm>
- Limit exposure to media coverage and social media related to COVID-19. Over-exposure can increase feelings of panic and despair.

Tips for Managing COVID-19 Stress

- Try to accept the “new normal.”
 - Accepting and practicing new concepts such as social distancing and frequent hand washing can increase feelings of having some control over the crisis.
- Focus on positive control.
 - It is natural to feel out of control during these unprecedented times but taking control of things that are within our control can be empowering. Be sure to eat healthy, exercise, rest, and follow the CDC guidelines regarding social distancing, sanitizing, hand washing etc.

Coping with COVID-19

- Connect with others.
 - Think of creative ways to connect with others while staying home. Use of technology such as FaceTime, Zoom meetings with family/friends, and phone calls are important to offset excessive feelings of isolation.
- Plan virtual lunch dates, coffee breaks, yoga classes etc.
- Take care of your body and don't neglect workout routines.
 - Even when gyms are closed be sure to create an at home workout routine. Cardiovascular exercise and/or yoga can help combat feeling of anxiety and depression.

Coping with COVID-19

- Make time to unwind.
 - Be sure to engage in self-care including reading, relaxing, listening to music, meditation etc.
- Stay on a schedule and keep days as similar to your normal routine as possible.
- Spend time outside.
 - Spending time outside is important when working or attending school remotely. Be sure to take time for walks or hikes whenever possible.

Coping with COVID-19

People with pre-existing mental health issues may need additional support during this pandemic.

- Most mental health professionals are offering telecounseling services and phone appointments during self-isolation.
- SUNY Orange Wellness Center is offering personal counseling for stress related to COVID-19 or any other personal issues for registered students by virtual appointment or by phone.
 - Interested students may email maureen.flaherty@sunyorange.edu to schedule an appointment.

Coping with COVID-19

- Other resources for Mental Health Support
 - Orange County Mobile Mental Health/Crisis Call Center:
 - Free service that connects Orange County residents in need of support for mental health issues, substance use, sexual assault, and thoughts of suicide. Trained professionals are available 24/7 by phone or in person (if necessary) **1(800) 832-1200**.
 - Mental Health and Substance Use Urgent Care:
 - Walk-in care for mental health and addiction concerns - Two locations: Union Street Community Counseling Center, Middletown, NY and Kaplan Family Counseling Center, Newburgh, NY **1(888)750-2266**.

Breathing Exercises for Reducing Stress

Breathing exercises offer an extremely simple, effective and convenient way to relieve stress and reverse your stress response.

- There are several breathing approaches that are found to be helpful by encouraging full oxygen exchange, which slows heart rate and can lower blood pressure.
- “4-7-8 Breathing” is recommended by wellness expert Dr. Andrew Weil. It involves inhaling for a count of four, waiting for a count of seven, and exhaling for a count of eight.

Breathing Exercises for Stress

The following video will walk you through 4-7-8

Breathing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grTLI6vjShY&t=56s>

Some additional Apps for Meditation:

- The Mindfulness App
- Headspace
- Calm
- Stop, Breathe & Think
- Breethe



Please try not to panic,
please stay calm,
and please stay well.
We will get through this together.