

TIP SHEET: MANAGING PANDEMIC STRESS

News of a potential or actual pandemic causes stress for a lot of people - that's to be expected. Sometimes stress can be a motivator to do the extra work that's needed to stay safe in difficult times. But too much stress gets in the way of staying calm and taking the steps needed to stay healthy. This tip sheet offers ideas to help focus your emotional and physical energy in healthy ways. The goal is to control stress and worries about the illness so you can go on with your life while getting ready for or living through a pandemic.

LEARN ABOUT THE PANDEMIC

- Learn as much as you can from trustworthy sources - this puts you in control and reduces stress.
- Don't listen to too much "illness news" - a constant flood of information can increase your worries.
- Listen for what you need to know - you're better able to care for yourself and family knowing:
 - Symptoms of the illness
 - How the illness is spread
 - The best ways to protect against getting the illness
 - What to do if someone at home has "illness-like" symptoms
 - When and how to seek medical care for the illness
 - What is needed and how to care for someone at home with the illness
 - Where to learn if local schools, work or other places are closing

For trustworthy information about a pandemic, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://www.cdc.gov/>.

PLAN AHEAD

- Plan ahead to help protect against the illness - your positive actions will also reduce stress.
- Become prepared - so that you're able to keep a comfortable and fairly regular, daily routine.
- Keep daily routines - they provide reassurance, relief and stress reduction during times of crisis.
 - Teach family members good health practices - cover sneezes and coughs, and wash hands often.
 - Eat a healthy diet, exercise and get enough rest to feel refreshed each day.
 - Teach kids to keep their hands away from their mouth, nose and eyes as much as possible.
 - Make a list of doctors, pharmacy, family and emergency contact numbers for each family member.
 - Check to be sure doctor-prescribed medicines are updated and filled for all family members.
 - Stock your home with a 2-week supply of water, food, batteries and medical supplies (for pets, too).
 - Support family members by listening and talking: learn what your kids have heard about the pandemic, address their concerns and talk with them about how you (and doctors) are prepared to care for them.
 - Build resilience in family members - identify and discuss thoughts and feelings, ways to respond appropriately, and help them find healthy ways to "de-stress".

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PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY WITH ACTION

- Stay updated during and beyond the pandemic phase - because things change from day-to-day.
- Maintain and develop your support systems - sharing concerns with others will reduce your stress.
- Accept that you are doing all you can - and know that you are unable to control all things.
 - Continue to follow good health practices.
 - Make use of community services as appropriate - call 2-1-1 for information on what is available.
 - Realize that fear is a natural human emotion - and keep taking steps to reduce stress and anxiety.
 - Lower the demands on yourself and others when the pandemic is at its worst and many people are sick
 - Know that feelings of fear, grief, loneliness, stress and panic are normal reactions during stressful times.
 - Practice positive self-talk and positive thinking - combat any negative thinking habits.

EXPECT CHANGES AND MISINFORMATION AND RESPOND WISELY

- Daily schedules may be disrupted due to school or business closings - being flexible is the key.
- Misinformation will be spread around - you can take responsibility for getting the correct information.
- Poorly informed people may show fear and disrespect for sick people and their family members.
 - Learn to roll with daily changes when necessary and enjoy familiar routines when possible.
 - Be kind and forgiving to yourself and loved ones - modify your schedules and goals to match reality.
 - Don't be quick to assume the worst when hearing scary pandemic information - you can check it out.
 - If you see negative behaviors directed at people with the illness, try to support those hurt by the behaviors.
 - If you're kept apart by school or business closures, use phones, computers and mail to stay in touch.
 - If school is closed, consider books and distance learning options for kids.
 - Continue to identify and engage in more "comfort" activities during stressful times.
 - Start a new routine for "at home" days. What have you imagined doing if you had more time at home?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE AND MANAGING STRESS

- Mindfulness Toolkit: <http://www.mindfulness.tools/>
- Resiliency Toolkit: <https://www.resiliency.tools/>
- Meditation Toolkit: <https://www.meditate.tools/>