

SIGNS OF DISTRESS

Coping with Pandemic Fatigue

The unique stressors of the pandemic are layered on top of all the other stressors that life serves up. It's normal to have emotional reactions to this challenge. It's natural to feel stressed, sad, upset and worn out at times. But if you notice that you're struggling most days, or that difficult emotions, lack of energy, or other issues are impacting day-to-day life, it may be a cue to reach out for help.

Signs that stress may be building to distress

- › Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- › Upset stomach, heartburn, diarrhea, constipation
- › Grinding/cracked teeth, jaw pain
- › Head and neck aches
- › Frequent aches and pains or illness without clear cause
- › Rapid, shallow breathing and/or rapid heart rate
- › Lack of energy, focus, motivation
- › Feeling tired even after adequate sleep
- › Sexual difficulties
- › Increased/excessive hair loss
- › Irritability, outbursts, anger that's hard to control
- › Feeling restless, edgy, agitated
- › Appetite and/or weight change
- › Pulling away from other people
- › Uncharacteristic behaviors for you
- › Increased substance use as a way of coping
- › Loss of interest in things that normally matter to you
- › Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" feeling
- › Feeling worthless, guilty, hopeless
- › Worrying that is overwhelming or hard to control
- › Thoughts of death or suicide

Resources for support

Don't feel that you have to wait until you're in a crisis to reach out for help. A mental health professional can be a listening ear, help you problem-solve, and work out coping strategies specific to your situation. They can be valuable allies as we all try to weather this storm.

Your EAP is available 24/7. You can be connected with immediate help over the phone or get help to find a mental health professional in your area. Your EAP can also help locate resources for home life support, such as child care.

Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741 to chat with a crisis counselor

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800.273.8255 or click to chat at: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

SAMHSA National Helpline 1.800.662.HELP (4357) Free, confidential, treatment referral and information.

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1.800.799.SAFE or click to chat at: www.thehotline.org

References

National Institutes of Health. (2021). Stress and your health. Retrieved from <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003211.htm>
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UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

Coping with Pandemic Fatigue

It may seem difficult to keep going when there seems to be no end in sight to the difficulties we've been facing. It helps to slow down and take the time to really look into ourselves: what builds us up, what drags us down, what gives us momentum. Self-reflection requires that we take a "balcony view," trying to see the "cause and effect" of the people, places, things, and challenges in your life. Think about what you have endured over the past year, and you overcame each obstacle. Notice patterns in your response by answering the following questions:

Understanding your challenges

- › What made you feel anxious or irritable?
- › What made you feel tired or bogged down?
- › What made you uncomfortable, or feel at risk?
- › Who brings you down or doesn't provide the support you need?

Understanding what helps

- › What helps you feel soothed, calm, and relaxed?
- › When do you feel the most energized and motivated? What are you doing?
- › What makes you feel safe, protected?
- › Who has provided you with the support you need?

Using self-reflection

Having a firm understanding of what triggers your reactions gives you a starting place from which to make changes.

How can you minimize the things that contribute to your challenges?

How can you make more room in your life for the things that help?

REFRESH YOUR SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

Coping with Pandemic Fatigue

By now you've likely identified a few "go-to" strategies that help you feel calm, energized, or more focused. As the pandemic continues to impact our activities and daily living, you might find that these strategies are not as effective or engaging as they used to be. This is a normal process as we get used to – and better at – the things that used to challenge us. Use the information below for some ideas on revitalizing your self-care strategies.

If exercise works for you...

- › **Try something new.** Revisit a fitness activity from your youth, such as hula hoop or jump rope. Challenge your brain with kickboxing or dance routines. Be sure to check with your physician before starting in a new fitness regimen or equipment.
- › **Be resourceful.** Equipment can be hard to come by. Get creative in your home or environment. Use kitchen counters, sturdy furniture, or walls to intensify strength workouts. Park benches or trees can serve the same purpose for outdoor workouts. Use household items for weights, such as soup cans or water bottles.
- › **Balance with restorative fitness.** Don't forget your rest days! Yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, or stretching exercises can help calm your mind as well as your body. Pilates or barre exercises can help with conditioning and coordination.
- › **Take it outside.** Take a walk around the block or a nearby park. Even small doses of fresh air can help you feel more energized and invigorated.
- › **Find new motivators.** Create a new playlist with music you find energizing. There are hundreds of fitness apps that can design workouts for you, or engage your friends or family in friendly – and motivating – competition.
- › **Make it easy.** If you work from home, wear your workout clothes when appropriate to make it easy to start (and complete) your workout. Wear them to bed to make it easier to get up for a morning exercise routine. Use your break time to get active.

If acts of kindness work for you...

- › **Find a local mutual aid group.** These groups offer you the opportunity to connect and provide support, both virtually and in-person, to those in need in your own community. Search online to find one near you.
- › **Try random acts of kindness.** Showing kindness to others, even those you don't know, can help you feel more gratitude and purpose. Leave a note for a loved one in an unexpected place. Make a favorite treat or meal for a neighbor or friend.
- › **Reach out to people you know,** especially if they may be struggling. A friendly text or a phone call might make all the difference in someone's day. Say thank you to someone for the work they do, the comfort they provided, or simply for being in your life.
- › **Consider how your skills can help others.** If you are a talented dancer, consider offering videos or virtual classes to teach others. If you're good with finances, can you advise struggling small businesses or individuals who've lost their jobs? Find ways to use your skills in creative ways to support your community.
- › **If it's safe, offer to babysit or pet-sit for a friend, family member, or neighbor.** They will appreciate having the time to themselves, and gives you the opportunity to strengthen your social connections (even with pets!).

If getting out in nature works for you...

- › **Bring the outdoors in.** If the weather is keeping you inside, bring the outdoors inside with an indoor garden, or have a “world-watching window” to observe birds, clouds, or weather from inside. Watch a live nature cam from your computer.
- › **Research local parks or trails that are “off the beaten path.”** There are numerous apps that catalog walking trails by location and difficulty level. Don’t rule out a short road trip or journey outside your zip code to broaden your options.
- › **Build something.** Use the resources at your disposal (blankets, poles, sticks, etc.) to build a fort or den that you and your family can enjoy. If you have a yard, consider planting a garden or make a mini-pond to invite wildlife into your space.
- › **Make it a game.** Pick a theme and incorporate into your outdoor activities. For example, with a “flower” theme, take pictures of all the flowers you see on a hike or walk around your community and review once complete. Make it a friendly competition with others.

If purposeful pursuits work for you...

- › **Freshen up your living space.** Frame some new photos, or make some wall art with a canvas and paint. Change up your furniture layout for a change in scenery. Tidy up cluttered spaces to help you feel organized.
- › **Enroll in that virtual class.** Many community education programs have taken their classes virtual. There are numerous free classes available online, such as computer programming, learning a new language, or even college courses. Download an app to learn a new language or musical instrument.
- › **Research a home improvement project.** Think about a project on your “to-do” list that seems overwhelming. Start by researching how you might start, finding online tutorials or blog posts. It may be that after you begin your research, the project is less daunting than it seems!

If creativity works for you...

- › **Connect with others in new ways.** Write letters if you’re used to texting. Make and send themed postcards or even “chain letters.” There are online games and competitions for many past times, such as jigsaw puzzles or building your own board game.
- › **Digitize old photo albums.** This is a fun way to share stories with family members and revisit old memories. You can collect photos into a photobook or other creative project.
- › **Write a short story.** Try your hand at creating and writing a fictional story. Start writing and see what comes to your mind. Try this as a family and swap stories with each other.
- › **Try a new creative pursuit.** Doodle on a notebook, or invest in inexpensive art supplies like watercolors or coloring books. It doesn’t matter what the end product looks like. You might find a hidden talent!

If escapism or storytelling works for you...

- › **Discover classic TV shows or movies.** Start from the beginning and commit to a few episodes or a movie a week.
- › **Start a virtual “series club.”** Stream a new series with friends. Watch it “together” virtually or agree on ground rules, such as the number of episodes to view a week. Schedule a weekly or monthly virtual or socially distanced meeting to discuss developments in the series.
- › **Read a novel of a new author or genre.** We all have our preferences, but try to branch out. Check out bestseller lists and choose a random title, or ask to borrow the last book a friend or family member read. Try a classic novel you’ve never read before.
- › **Listen to a podcast.** There is a podcast for every preference. True crime, “how-to,” historical, documentaries, storytelling, and so much more! Do a search for a topic that interests you and pick an episode to try.
- › **Get to know your own story.** Explore your ancestry using internet tools or DNA registries. Reach out to family members for more information and stories.

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