COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

NORTH CAROLINA AHEC

The COVID-19 outbreak may be stressful for people. Taking steps to cope with stress and maintain your wellness can help you and those you care about.

AM I FEELING STRESSED?

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Worsening of mental health conditions
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Other emotional or mental health changes

Quarantine and isolation can be very stressful as well. People feel many emotions during and after quarantine and isolation, including:

- Fear or worry about your health
- Fear and worry about the health of others around you
- Stress from having to monitor yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Sadness, anger, or frustration if loved ones are afraid of getting the virus from you, even after you are out of quarantine or Isolation
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine or isolation
- Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine or isolation
- Other emotional or mental health changes

These feelings are normal.

HOW CAN I FEEL LESS STRESSED?

- **Take breaks** from news updates and social media. Thinking about COVID-19 all the time can be stressful. Pick a good source (like the CDC or WHO) and only check for updates once or twice a day.
- **Practice good sleep hygiene.**
  - Avoid afternoon caffeine.
  - Don't use screens (TV, computers, phones, or tablets) for one hour before bed.
  - Try to keep a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed at the same time each night. Wake up at the same time each morning.
- **Connect with others.**
  - Check in with your loved ones often. Consider connecting with them via phone, email, text messages, or video chat.
  - Do activities together virtually, like having meals or playing a game.
  - Tell a friend or someone you trust how you are feeling.
  - Maintain a strong support system.
- **Do something meaningful.**
  - Learn a new skill.
  - Make art: draw, paint, write, or build.
  - Try a new recipe.
  - Read an eBook or listen to an audiobook. Check your public library's website for free options.
- **Take care of your body.**
  - Try to eat nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables.
  - Maintain good hygiene by washing your hands regularly.
  - Avoid using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- **Get active.** Exercise helps both our physical and mental health.
  - Go for a walk
  - Try a free workout video on YouTube
  - Stretch or do yoga
  - Dance
- **Find ways to relax or meditate**.
  - Take deep breaths.
  - Try a meditation app (Headspace, Calm)
  - Try to focus on the positive. Keep a journal of things you are thankful for.
- **Ask for help when you need it**.
  - If your emotions are affecting your ability to do your normal activities for several days in a row, call your provider. Ask your provider if virtual visits (telehealth) are an option. You can also learn about these options here: telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/
  - If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, and anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others, seek help. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
  - For victims and survivors who need support, contact The National Domestic Violence Helpline. Call **1-800-799-7233**, visit thehotline.org or text **LOVEIS** to **22522**.
  - If you or a loved one is facing mental or substance use disorders, contact SAMHSA's National Helpline. This confidential and free service can help connect you with local treatment facilities, support groups, and organizations. Call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or visit www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline.