

Building your resilience during the second wave of COVID-19

As winter approaches, efforts in many states across the country to control a second rise in COVID-19 infections also mean continued social isolation and hardship for millions of people.

High, chronic levels of stress resulting from unemployment and economic insecurity, school closures, disruption to normal routines, illness and loss have a negative impact on mental and physical health. In addition to the burden of the pandemic, simmering political and social tensions have left many people feeling distressed and threatened.¹

As a nation, we face a challenging winter even as coronavirus vaccination news looks promising. It will be months before a vaccine can be widely distributed across the population, and even then, life may not be back to normal. In the meantime, it is important to care for your mental health through this next phase.

People at risk

A significant number of Americans report feeling depressed and anxious as a result of the pandemic. People who are already prone to mental health problems, people with low incomes, minorities, young people and isolated older adults (especially those living in facilities) are at higher risk of depression.

If you or a loved one are struggling with persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness that last for two weeks or more, have lost interest in things you used to enjoy, have thoughts of self-harm and/or experience sleep disturbances and changes in appetite, it is important to see a doctor for an evaluation and possible treatment of your symptoms. There are effective treatments for depression, including medication and various therapies.

Building resilience

There are several ways to build resilience and prepare emotionally for shutdowns. Research shows that resilience skills can be learned and include the following:

- **Social connections.** A strong social support network is one of the most important parts of building resilience. If face-to-face contact is not possible, stay in touch and check in on family and friends by phone or video.
- **Pay attention to negative thoughts and practice gratitude.** Resilient people tend to be optimistic and flexible in their thinking. If the news and social media makes you anxious and unhappy, limit your screen time.
- **Assess what you can and cannot change.** Focus on positive actions, even if the possibilities seem limited.
- **Tap into your talents:** revisit an old hobby or try something you've always wanted to do.
- **Take care of yourself.** Maintain routines, get enough sleep and exercise and eat a healthy diet. Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to combat sadness or boredom.

Having goals and a purpose can also increase resilience. The pandemic has led many to rediscover a new appreciation for their gifts, relationships and values that give meaning to their lives. If you are doing all the right things to build your resilience and still feeling down, consult with your doctor. You will get through this.

Help is available. Your program is confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

1. Nancy Schimelpfening, "This COVID-19 Spike Will Also Hit our Mental Health with a 'Second Wave,'" September 23, 2020, Healthline, www.healthline.com/health-news/this-covid-19-spike-will-also-hit-our-mental-health-with-a-second-wave#Why-is-the-pandemic-putting-our-mental-health-at-risk?