

7 Tips to strengthen your mental health during the pandemic

There is no question that the pandemic has affected the mental health of Americans of all ages. We have experienced months of social isolation, job changes and unemployment, school closures and other disruptions. This has led to a surge in the number of people reporting high levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Given the uncertainty of when life will return to normal, finding ways to manage negative emotions and strengthen your mental health is important.

Building and exercising resilience skills can help protect your mental and emotional health. Try these tips:

- **Stay in touch with positive and supportive people, even if you can't see them in person.** Strong social connections can reduce stress and help you feel happier and more energetic. If you haven't already, learn to use video platforms like FaceTime and Zoom to stay in touch with friends and family.
- **Practice ways to manage everyday stress.** For some people, a daily walk eases the pressure of the day. Try meditation, reading, yoga, working on a hobby, listening to music or any other activity that you enjoy. Practice finding something you can be grateful for every day. You will feel more positive and recharged.
- **Find what motivates you.** Research shows that people who feel they have a purpose in life tend to be happier and live longer. For some, being creative, helping other people or devoting their time and energy to a cause can be the best motivators.
- **Make self-care a priority.** Physical and mental health are closely intertwined. In difficult times, it is important to get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet and exercise. Avoid using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope with negative emotions; they can make sadness, depression and anxiety worse.

- **Limit the amount of time you spend on social media and the news.** If you are constantly frustrated and upset over what you see in the news or on social media, limit or take a break from both.
- **Maintain your sense of humor and practice reframing negative thoughts.** If negative thoughts and images are invading your mind, draw your attention to your surroundings. Being present in the moment, or mindful, is one way to break a pattern of negative thinking. Humor is another way to defuse negative emotions.
- **Give others the benefit of the doubt.** Everyone is affected by the pandemic in one way or another, and others' emotions may not be obvious. Be kind in any interaction with others.

If you find that your mental health symptoms are negatively impacting your quality of life, consider talking to a professional.

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