

A Chat about COVID-19 and stress, anxiety, depression and the CommonHealth of Kentucky

The current COVID-19 outbreak is a stressful situation. The fear and anxiety you may be feeling might seem overwhelming for you or your children and your family. We've been told to practice social distancing – and for good reason – but know that you aren't alone, and there are many things you can do to cope with the added stress or anxiety.

Anyone may be prone to added stress or anxiety, but certain people may be more prone to stress:

- Children and teens.
- Older adults or people at higher risk for COVID-19 due to chronic diseases.
- Healthcare providers and first responders.
- People with mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, substance use.

With stress you may have noticed:

- Difficulty sleeping, or a change in sleeping patterns.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Changes in eating patterns.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Being hyper vigilant of aches and pains or other physical symptoms.
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco (including vaping) or drugs and even caffeine.

How to deal with stress:

- Stay in touch with friends and loved ones. Connect and talk with people you trust.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals regularly.
- Exercise: go for a walk, jog or bike ride. Getting outside is OK – and encouraged – if you practice social distancing. Getting in touch with nature is healing.
- Reading, listening to books on tape, watching a film, listening to music can transport you for a little while.
- Share what is helping you with others.
- Look for tried and true strategies of calming such a Mindfulness.
- Set aside your worrying for a specific time of day (not near bedtime), write down your thoughts. Challenge them if they are making your more upset.

Learn more but:

- Take breaks from watching or reading about the pandemic.
- Make sure what you're reading about COVID-19 comes from a trusted, reputable source.
- Remember good anxiety helps you learn, plan, think, and act safely. Too much anxiety can make it harder for you to do these good things.

My friend and colleague Shannon Wyatt, LPCC recommends the following for dealing with stress:

1. Yoga
YouTube has free videos for children and adults.
 - Cosmic Kids Yoga for elementary age kids
 - Yoga with Adriene for adults and older teens
2. Use the Internet

- **Explore.org** has many live nature webcams
 - **Kennedy-center.org** : Lunch Doodle with Mo Willems (for kids)
 - **Metmuseum.org** has a kids art education and activities section in addition to sections for adults
 - **Nasa.gov** has hundreds of space photos open for viewing
3. Start or plan a new hobby. If you already have a hobby, spend time with it often.
 4. Mindfulness Apps:
 - Headspace
 - Breathe+
 - Calm
 5. Spend time with animals, either your own or in nature. Visit duck/geese ponds (don't feed them bread or other grains, it will make them sick).

CommonHealth of Kentucky

- We are all in this together. We are social animals. We are all helping each other by reaching out responsibly, by email, video conferencing and an old fashioned letter and phone call.
- We may have heard about, known and loved folks from the Greatest Generation and have heard about their sacrifices and what they did to help each other.
- Maybe we are the CommonHealth of Kentucky Generation and people will talk about what we did to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic in the years to come.