

# The toll of COVID-19

## Safeguard your mental wellbeing along with your physical health

Courtesy Four County Mental Health Center  
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Stress is a killer, they say, and it's true. In normal times, anxiety and depression are prevalent, with 18% of the population experiencing an anxiety disorder and 7% experiencing a depressive episode at any given time. These statistics are from the "olden times," the pre-COVID-19 times. Since the pandemic has hit, stress and depression have increased phenomenally, as we now have added stress with illness, wellbeing of ourselves and others, a catastrophic death toll, increase in unemployment, school stress, stress with homeschooling our children and a massive political battle about the whole thing. It is enough to make anyone stressed out and feel hopeless. However, it does not do any good to talk about the stress and the pandemic without talking about ways to cope with it.

So how do we cope with this stress? Certainly, there are different ways to cope for different people, and some things will work better for some people, other things for other people. Certainly, there are what is considered to be positive coping skills and those considered to be negative coping skills. Things like drugs, alcohol, binge eating and increased screen time

may help in the moment or for short periods of time, but they may also lead to other problems, including physical health problems, social problems and legal troubles, and ultimately may increase your stress rather than decrease it. Social isolation can provide some feelings of security during this challenging time and may seem the best way to prevent COVID from your house. The danger of isolation, though, is the loss of human connection, which is a natural way to manage stress, depression and anxiety. Social media can be a positive experience for many, but there are downsides to social media use and information overload. As it is recommended with children, it may be helpful to limit screen time, especially social media and various news stories; instead plan a time each day to engage on the

internet, but set a clear start and end time for yourself.

### HEALTHY COPING SKILLS

Luckily, there are many positive coping skills that can be used to help manage stress and manage ourselves to be able to thrive in this stressful time and handle stress as well as we are able. Three things that naturally boost mood are sunlight, fresh air and exercise; these things, in and of themselves, can help you fight stress and decrease depression. Use them in any combination; go for a run, a walk, a hike; go camping; take your children to the park and play with them; go visit the free Ralph Mitchell Zoo; geocache; fly a kite; start your fall garden; paint rocks and hide them around for people to find; have a socially distanced get-together like an outdoor

cookout...the list of things goes ever on and on, and there are NO WRONG ANSWERS!

Of course, maybe you're not outdoorsy, and that's okay, too! Find things inside that can help boost your mood, such as playing games with family and friends; socially distanced time with family and friends; cooking; organizing your house; taking a warm bath; reading...again, the list is endless and you very likely have your

own ideas for what works for you, and again, there are NO WRONG ANSWERS! For those in recovery from substance use, spending time with healthy supports such as local self help, sponsors and peer support can help ensure that despite the stressors of the pandemic, you are able to remain in recovery.

The key to good mental health is self-care. This is true for stress any time, and it is especially true through particularly stressful periods, like right now. Self-care involves a few different actions. One step is rational detachment, or the ability to put stress to the side when you can, whether it be for a weekend, the night, an hour or five minutes. The stress will be there and needs to be dealt with, and it can be most effectively dealt with if you can put it aside for brief periods



Three things that naturally boost mood are:

- Sunlight
- Fresh Air
- Exercise

These things in and of themselves can help fight stress and decrease depression.

**'The key to good mental health is self-care.'**

of time and focus on self-care. Self-care involves finding positive things to do that are not stressful and that recharge your battery and pep you up, so that you are able to jump into the fray and once more be able to handle the stress that life brings, and in this case, be able to handle the stress of an ongoing pandemic that wants to break you down and make you stressed. It's not a bad thing to take a break and to give yourself time and grace to handle stress. You wouldn't begrudge someone else needing to take that time - treat yourself as nicely as you would treat other people. You are equally as important, and you equally deserve that break.

### WHEN AND HOW TO SEEK HELP

Of course, if you've tried these things and find that they are not working for you, if you cannot think of ways to deal with stress, if stress is overwhelming you and the coping skills and not there, mental health services are always available for those who need them.

There are several great resources to utilize when it is time to seek help. **Four County Mental Health Center** is the local community mental health center and can be contacted by calling **620-331-1748** or **800-499-1748**, and there are crisis services which can be utilized 24/7 by calling the Four County phone number. Primary care physicians are another great resource for seeking assistance.

Additionally, there are several text and hotline phone numbers to utilize including:

### NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE:

**1-800-273-8255** or text **HOME** to **741741**

### VETERANS CRISIS LINE:

**1-800-273-8255** and select option **1**  
or text **838255**

### COMPASSIONATE EAR

**WARM LINE:**  
**(866) 927-6327**

**Hours: 4pm to 10pm every night of the year**

Taking care of your mental health is not a weakness, it is a strength. No one would say that going to the doctor for diabetes is a weakness; taking care of your mental health is as important as taking care of your physical health. Take advantage of all the resources you have to ensure that you are mentally healthy, and recognize that in times of great stress, consciously taking care of your mental health may be the best thing that you can do. ★