

## Heed the Signs of Stress

Nearly 80% of Americans suffer from symptoms of chronic stress... but amidst a pandemic, even those individuals who tend to brush off anxiety may feel mentally and physically overwhelmed. That's why it's important to understand stress and how to cope with it, and when to seek help.

Stress is the body's reaction to harmful situations, whether real or perceived. When you feel threatened, a chemical reaction occurs in your body that allows you to act in a way that helps prevent potential injury. During this response, your heart rate increases, breathing quickens, muscles tighten, and blood pressure rises. While some stress is beneficial, when it reoccurs frequently, it can become harmful to the body.

Everyone reacts to stress differently. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), your response can be influenced by demographics, background, and even by your community, especially during unusual circumstances like a pandemic. Common stress symptoms and responses include changes in sleep or eating patterns, difficulty concentrating, or worsening of chronic health problems.

Though some stress is normal and to be expected, it's crucial to your physical and mental well-being that you heed the warning signs of prolonged anxiety. If you or your loved ones need help coping with stress, contact your family physician immediately.



## Coping During a Pandemic

Reducing stress can be beneficial for both your mental and physical health.

- **Educate yourself.** Understanding pandemic risks can help ease tension. Use a credible source such as the CDC website.
- **Unplug.** Whether it be the TV, social media, or the radio, just unplug for awhile.
- **Exercise.** It's not only good for you physically, but it also releases endorphins or "feel good" receptors.
- **Use the "4-7-8" breathing technique.** Breath in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds.
- **Connect with others (from a distance).** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and feelings. This may include your family physician if you feel that your symptoms are beginning to take a toll on your health.



SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The American Institute of Stress, The Cleveland Clinic, Medical News Today