

Psychological Coping during a Pandemic

Pandemics, like COVID-19, challenge the way people cope. During a pandemic it's not uncommon to experience strong emotions. Psychology helps us to understand normal responses to abnormal events – this can help Albertans cope. Novel & unfamiliar threats provoke anxiety & even unrealistic fears & racism. Social distancing, effective communication, & public health measures are realistic lines of defense.

Stay Informed – Not Overloaded. With major news events, media inundates us with coverage & potential implications – that can create additional stress. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Framing risk with clear facts helps quell panic. Alberta Health Services, the World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada, & the US Center for Disease Control are all reliable information sources. Minimize unnecessary exposure to stories or gossip about the pandemic.

Stay healthy -- A healthy lifestyle is your best defense against disease. Physical health has positive impacts on psychological health (and vice versa). Social distancing & good personal hygiene will keep you, & others, safe.

Manage your own Stress

- **Limit your media consumption** to just enough to stay informed. Take some time for yourself, go for a walk, or spend time with friends & family doing things that you enjoy.
- **Avoid getting into discussions about the event** if you think they have the potential to escalate to conflict. Be cognizant of the frequency with which you're discussing the news.
- **Stress & anxiety about the future is not productive.** Instead, work on issues you care about.
- **Remember that life will go on.** People have always survived difficult life circumstances. There is no reason why this situation cannot be similar. Avoid catastrophizing & maintain a balanced perspective.
- **Build your resilience** – we can learn to adapt well to stress – how have you coped with stressors before? Add resilience tools to your tool bag to manage life's adversities.
- **Keep connected.** Maintain your social networks (even via social media & telephone).
- **Keep things in perspective --** Our government needs to prepare for possible worst-case scenarios in order to protect the public. The public, however, does not need to expect the worst.
- **Have a plan --** How would you respond if you or a loved one were diagnosed with COVID-19? Developing contingency plans for potential scenarios can lessen your anxiety.

When to seek professional help

Psychologists are trained to help people find constructive ways of dealing with anxiety & emotional stress. Contact a psychologist if:

- You feel overwhelming nervousness or lingering sadness adversely affecting you
- You notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness & you feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities & activities

More Information -- CDC hand washing <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>; When someone has COVID-19 <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/pandemic-resources>; Communication during a pandemic <https://www.apa.org/monitor/mar06/communication>; & <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/02/coronavirus-threat>; responding to coverage -- <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics>