

## **EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IS NORMAL**

Emotional distress is common and normal in the context of uncertainty and potentially life-threatening situations, such as COVID-19 pandemic.

Stress can present itself in different ways including physical, emotional, or cognitive ways.

## **COMMON STRESS REACTIONS**

- Excessive worry, feeling overwhelmed, or realizing that it's hard to stop thinking about stressors.
- Trouble sleeping or staying asleep; changes in eating patterns such as eating too little/too much.
- Hypervigilance, which can look like excessive or frequent checking up on the news, or constantly checking on family or friends.
- Difficulty relaxing, including muscle tension, and feeling keyed up or on edge.
- Unhealthy coping such as increased alcohol, tobacco, or drug use in order to distance yourself from stress.
- Irritability, anger, impatience, and other emotional reactions, including tearfulness, and sadness.
- Wanting to be alone, or feeling detached or numb.
- Feeling easily overwhelmed or frustrated.
- Feeling confusion and resistance to change.
- Difficulty in reasoning, loss of objectivity.
- Physical reactions: chest pain, headaches, dizziness, increased heart rate, shallow breathing, feeling hot or chilled, dry mouth, etc.

## **AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM**

**Sympathetic Nervous System:** Fight, Flight, or Freeze

**Parasympathetic Nervous System:** Rest & Digest

The amygdala is the part of the brain that triggers our anxiety switch and creates the physiological symptoms of anxiety.

## SELF-CARE TO MANAGE STRESS

1. Maintain a routine that focuses on a healthy lifestyle. Eating well, exercising, and adequate sleep will help to improve mood and reduce stress levels.
2. Avoid or limit caffeine, nicotine or alcohol. Be careful of stress eating.
3. Limit media and social media exposure.
4. Be positive and focus on gratitude:
  - Create a daily gratitude list of 3-5 things that positively influenced your day.
  - Use meditation or prayer; listen to inspirational podcasts.
  - Laugh, and try to find humor in situations!
5. Don't isolate. Stay connected with family, friends and social groups.
6. Practice deep breathing. This resets your body to the calmer parasympathetic nervous system. Practicing deep breathing daily trains your body to more easily calm down when anxious. A very simple way to incorporate this is to **take 5 deep breaths every time you wash your hands during the day:**
  - Inhale fully, expanding the diaphragm and lower abdomen.
  - Hold for two counts
  - Exhale slowly, and longer than you inhaled.
7. Try mindfulness. Check out Headspace or Calm for guided mindfulness.
8. When overwhelmed, do **grounding techniques** that keep your body and mind connected:
  - Stop, look, and listen. Notice and name what you can see, hear and smell.
  - Write and/or say grounding statements:
    - "This situation won't last forever."
    - "My anxiety/fear/sadness won't kill me, it just doesn't feel good right now."
    - "These are just my feelings, and eventually they'll go away."
9. Try relaxation techniques: stretching, deep breathing, body scan.
10. Purge your thoughts on paper in the morning or evening: Journal or list worries to clear your mind. You can also review this later to prioritize worries, or to sort out what is rational or irrational.



## SHORT RELAXATION TECHNIQUES: WHEN YOU ONLY HAVE A FEW MINUTES

Correct Breathing	Learn to always breathe using the diaphragm. Let the breath reach the bottom of the lungs, and let the chest and shoulders relax. High, shallow chest breathing is stressful and gives messages of stress to the brain.
Three-Part Breathing	Take a deep breath and imagine the lungs divided into three parts. Visualize the lowest part of the lungs filling with air; the chest should remain relatively still. Imagine the middle part of the lungs filling; visualize the rib cage expanding. Visualize the upper part filling with air as your shoulders rise slight and over backward. Exhale fully and completely; drop your shoulders, feel your rib cage contract, and force every bit of air from the bottom of the lungs. Repeat.
Stretching	Gently roll your head and shoulders many times a day. Also, gently stretch other areas of the body that may need it.
Tense-Relax Muscles	Tighten the muscles you want to relax and feel the tension. Let the muscles become loose and limp and feel the relaxation.
Body Scan	With your mind, briefly scan every muscle in your body from your toes to your head. Release any tension with a relaxing breath. Correct your posture and relax all the muscles you are not using.
Jaw Drop	Be aware of any tightness in your jaw. Allow your jaw to loosen by separating your teeth.
Heaviness and Warmth in Hands & Arms	Relax your body and feel heaviness in your arms and hands. Imagine a warmth flowing through them. Imagine and experience your shoulders, arms, hands becoming heavy, relaxed, and warm.
Mind-Quieting Meditation	Begin by focusing on your breathing. Use a special phrase that helps you focus on relaxation, and quiet your mind.
Attitudes & Perceptions	Pay attention to your perceptions and attitudes. Allow yourself to put a stress-reducing "frame" around the stressor. Remember, stress affects the body based on perceptions of the outside world.

## **HELPFUL WEBSITES AND RESOURCES**

- Care for Your Coronavirus Anxiety: <https://www.virusanxiety.com/>
  - 7 Science-Based Strategies to Cope with Coronavirus Anxiety:  
<https://teconversation.com/7-science-based-strategies-to-cope-with-coronavirus-anxiety-133207>
  - Managing Coronavirus Virus Anxiety: 10 Practical Suggestions:  
[https://nickwignall.com/coronavirus-anxiety/?ck\\_subscriber\\_id=736862797](https://nickwignall.com/coronavirus-anxiety/?ck_subscriber_id=736862797)
  - Five Ways to View the Coverage of Coronavirus:  
<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics>
  - Taking Care of Yourself in Times of Uncertainty: <https://afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/>
  - COVID-19 & Your Mental Health (CAPS – Pat Walker Health Center)
  - American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19>
    - Coronavirus Anxiety Podcast
    - Coronavirus Response Research
    - Tips to Manage Anxiety
  - Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK
  - Crisis Text Line: Text “START” to 741-741
  - 10% Happier Podcast – YouTube
  - The Anxiety Guy Podcast
  - The Happiness Lab Podcast
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- If you would like to manage feelings of COVID-19 stress and anxiety through meditation, sleep, and movement exercises, **get help from:**

**Headspace web service**  
**Free to all Michiganders (normally a paid service)**  
**Visit: [headspace.com/mi](https://www.headspace.com/mi)**

**HELPNET EAP**  
**Battle Creek: 269-245-3900**  
**Kalamazoo: 269-372-4500**

## Have you experienced any of these symptoms in the last two weeks?

1. I felt dizzy, lightheaded, or faint when I read or listened to news about COVID.  
Yes                      No
2. I had trouble falling or staying asleep because I was thinking about COVID.  
Yes                      No
3. I felt paralyzed or frozen when I thought about or was exposed to information about COVID.  
Yes                      No
4. I lost interest in eating when I thought about or was exposed to information about COVID.  
Yes                      No
5. I felt nauseous or had stomach problems when I thought about or was exposed to information about COVID.    Yes                      No
6. I had disturbing thoughts that I may have caught the coronavirus.  
Yes                      No
7. I had disturbing thoughts that certain people I saw may have COVID.  
Yes                      No
8. I could not stop thinking about COVID.  
Yes                      No
9. I dreamed about COVID.    Yes                      No
10. I took my temperature to see if I was infected with COVID.  
Yes                      No
11. I read information on the internet to see if I had symptoms of COVID.  
Yes                      No
12. I read or watched videos to see if I was infected with COVID.  
Yes                      No
13. I spoke with other people about my symptoms to see if I was infected with COVID.  
Yes                      No
14. I spoke with a medical professional about my symptoms to see if I was infected with COVID.  
Yes                      No



## Burnout Self-Test

Instructions: For each question, place the corresponding number in the column that most applies.

Questions	Not At All (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy.					
I have negative thoughts about my job.					
I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve.					
I am easily irritated by small problems, or by my co-workers.					
I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my co-workers.					
I feel that I have no one to talk to.					
I feel that I am achieving less than I should.					
I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed.					
I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.					
I feel that I am in the wrong organization or profession.					
I am frustrated with parts of my job.					
I feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate my ability to do a good job.					
I feel that there is more work to do than I practically have the ability to do.					
I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job.					
I find that I do not have time to plan as much as I want to.					
<b>Total</b>					

**Score interpretations (No matter your score, pay attention to areas you ranked a 5)**

**15-18:** No sign of burnout.

**60-75:** Very severe risk of burnout.

**19-32:** Little sign of burnout.

**33-49:** At risk of burnout.

**50-59:** Severe risk of burnout.

Adapted from MindTools: Essential skills for an excellent career. Burnout Self-Test - [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLCS\\_98.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLCS_98.htm)