

10 Tips on Coping with COVID-19 from Campus Health Service at the University of Arizona

This is a strange, uncertain time we're in. Everything feels weird and different and scary. Counseling and Psych Services (CAPS) and Campus Health want you to know that we're here to help you stay healthy in body, mind, and spirit. This is stressful in a lot of ways, but we're all in this together figuring it out, and there are absolutely things you can do to feel better.

What is stress, and why are you feeling it?

Stress is the body's natural response to threats in the environment. Changes in your daily routine, uncertainties about your future, and situations that feel out of your control can all contribute to stress. Midterms, roommate arguments, and financial strain can stress us under normal circumstances. When you add something as big as a global pandemic, you'll feel the effects on your stress level.

Here's why...

The constant stream of data and input is stressful.

The unanswerable questions are stressful.

The risk is stressful.

And the actions we're already taking and may have to take in the future are stressful. Things like quarantine, remembering not to touch your face, or canceling plans you've been looking forward to can all be hard to cope with.

It's important to keep in mind that while it's unpleasant, stress isn't your enemy. It's your body's way of alerting you to a problem and motivating you to take corrective action. And that means that the stress signals your body's sending you are important to listen to. Managing your stress, anxiety, or depression starts with listening to those signals and learning how you can best support your own well-being.

Signs of stress:

Stress, when left unattended to, can take a toll on your body and mind, your relationships, your school or job performance, and most anything that's important to you. It can make it hard to think clearly and respond to things the way you normally would.

You might have already noticed changes in your sleeping and eating patterns. This might be especially true with the significant shift in daily routine we're all experiencing with social distancing.

You might feel sad, anxious, or irritable, maybe even in reaction to things that normally feel small or insignificant.

When you're stressed, you might lose interest or pleasure in the things you normally enjoy, have low energy, difficulty concentrating, or feel tense or restless.

For some, stress can also lead to increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, worsening of medical conditions, and physical complaints like headaches and upset stomach.

All in all, stress can make you feel and act like you're not yourself.

The good news is that there's a lot you can do to manage your stress, even when you're stuck in your house all day. **Self-care will probably look different now. Think of this as your opportunity to learn more about yourself.**

Here are 10 ways you can take good care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Establish a simple and sustainable daily routine.

Pay attention to the natural flow of your day and how it's working for you. Are you finding yourself with too much unstructured time on your hands? Filling your time with lots of projects or busy work? Checking email or the news when you'd normally be relaxing?

Try to establish a simple and sustainable routine that includes periods of activity *and* rest. Include the important elements of life in your routine. For example, give yourself time for pleasant physical activity, intellectually and creatively stimulating activities, quality interactions with the people you care about, time for work or school, and quality time to yourself.

To start the day off right, try setting an alarm, ideally for the same time every day, getting out of bed and getting dressed (even if you have no one to impress), and scheduling something to do in the morning (even if it's just an appointment to go make a cup of tea).

To end the day on a positive note, turn off the news and other media in the evening and give yourself something pleasant and relaxing to do. Try to give yourself at least 30 minutes to wind down before bed. During that time, put your devices away and do something pleasant that helps you get sleepy.

Keep your sleeping and eating on track.

Keeping a sustainable, healthy routine also means engaging in healthy sleeping and eating habits. As best as you can, go to bed and wake up at the same time every day and eat consistent meals. And even though you're inside a lot more, try to see the sun in the early morning and late afternoon. This does wonders for your circadian rhythm!

Make a fun to-do list.

It might be hard to think of how to occupy yourself in a moment of high stress or boredom, so prepare yourself with a fun cheat sheet. To make one, set a timer for 5-10 minutes and list everything you can think of that you enjoy doing from home, have wanted to try, or have access to. Make a wish list of books to read, movies to watch, skills to learn, or topics to study.

When you're done, take a short break. Then, come back and review your list. Put a star beside those ideas that excite you the most. And as best as you can, gather the resources you might need to begin one of these activities easily.

Finally, schedule them—and *don't* cancel on yourself!

Keep in touch with important people.

Pick up the phone, write a letter, turn off the news and reminisce about happy memories.

Remember that it's okay to talk about your feelings about the outbreak *AND* it's also okay to take a break from talking about it. Let your feelings be your guide as you decide what's right for you right now.

Give your pets (and kids) lots of love.

If you have pets or children, give them extra loving attention. Go ahead and do that now. (I'll wait).

Identify your strengths.

Remind yourself that you've been through difficult times before *AND* you've accomplished great things. Think back to the difficult times in your life and your past success with compassion and an open heart and reflect on what you learned about your unique strengths.

Practice compassion and embrace the solitude.

I know this is something most of us aren't used to, and it's one reason this whole experience is challenging. Try to take a little time every day to be quiet and still. Keep a diary, use a gratitude journal, stretch, or enjoy a quick meditation with soothing music. Even if you just close your eyes and breathe for a minute, it helps.

Now, you might have noticed that the people around you are stressed, too. **This pandemic is part of our shared human experience the world over.** Even though we're all seeing the same statistics and going through many of the same changes in daily life, we're not all going to react the same way. Keep this in mind and try to offer everyone, yourself included, plenty of patience and compassion.

Forget about the outbreak for a while in the little ways you can.

Give social media and the news a rest and enjoy conversations and activities that are **COMPLETELY UNRELATED TO COVID-19.** Let yourself laugh. Dance to your favorite songs. Dye your hair at home. Start a new hobby. Write a short story. **Remember, you're a full person with a variety of interests, ideas, and ambitions.**

BUT have a plan and use appropriate precautions.

The pandemic is real, and there are real risks even to young adults. So, in the little ways you can, be prepared.

While you don't need to know all the details or have all the answers, and goodness knows that none of us do right now, a basic emergency plan can help curb fears about what might happen if you or a family member gets sick, loses a job, or can't access food, health care, or other essential services.

Make a list of emergency contacts and talk to them about how you can support one another.

Keep your doctor's name and phone number handy, make sure your prescriptions and refills are up to date, and have other essential items on hand.

And if you're worried about someone in your life, give them a call and ask how you can support them.

Finally, reach out for the support you need.

This might come from friends or family or someone in a helping profession. I know that asking for help can be hard, but you are so worth taking care of.

Hang in there, Wildcat, and know that at CAPS and Campus Health, we're rooting for your health and well-being.

Take care.

Helpful Resources:

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline: For more information, visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline> or call 1-800-985-5990.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/

World Health Organization: www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019