

# COPING WITH PANDEMIC RELATED STRESS



**Positive Solutions**

MEDIATION · COUNSELLING · WORKPLACE

During an infectious disease outbreak, we may be required to spend more time at home and have less physical contact with others. Living in isolation can be stressful and it is normal to experience a number of changes in our feelings. This fact sheet provides information on some of the common feelings people experience and how we can manage our emotions during isolation.

## TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

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## YOUR EAP PROVIDER

An infectious disease outbreak is unlike anything we are likely to have experienced before and can lead to many significant changes in our lives. When we are faced with difficult situations, it is normal to experience feelings of stress. Stress is our normal protective response to challenging or dangerous situations.

At Positive Solutions we are here to help. If you feel you maybe need some assistance with coping through this difficult time, please contact us to make an appointment.

## STRESSORS DURING AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAK

An infectious disease outbreak can present many challenges, such as:

- **Our health and the health of loved ones** (e.g. we might worry about infection or spreading disease to others)
- **Restrictions on usual activities** (e.g. limits on travel and physical contact with others)
- **Access to essentials** (e.g. accessing medical care, prescriptions and basic supplies)
- **Finances** (e.g. changes to work hours or losing employment)

Being forced to quarantine can increase our risk of developing mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore, if we are faced with a period of isolation, it is very important that we look after our loved ones and ourselves.

## COMMON SIGNS OF STRESS

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue
- Headaches,
- Muscle tension
- Decreased sex drive
- High blood pressure
- Difficulty sleeping
- Angry outbursts
- Avoiding people
- Excessive use of alcohol and drugs
- Relationship issues
- Worry
- Crying
- Sense of loss of control
- Loss of confidence



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# OUR EMOTIONS DURING ISOLATION

People respond to stressful events differently and feelings vary from person to person. Not all of these feelings are necessarily negative. For example, during infectious disease outbreaks, some people have reported increased feelings of happiness, relief and solidarity. However, it is common to experience a number of other emotions when we are isolated. We may feel:

- Irritable
- Restless
- Bored
- Lonely
- Frustrated
- Angry
- Confused
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Grief
- Nervous
- Fearful

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.phoenixaustralia.org](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org)

## PRACTICAL THINGS WE CAN DO TO LOOK AFTER OUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING ISOLATION

### Obtaining the facts

We may be fearful about the health and safety of ourselves and others. Sourcing information from reputable sources like the World Health Organization (WHO) may help manage these fears.

### Taking basic precautions to prevent infection

The WHO recommends basic measures that people can take to protect themselves from COVID-19 infection, such as: hygiene practices (e.g. regular hand washing and avoiding touching your face), and physical distancing from others. Taking basic precautions can help reduce anxiety.

### Taking a break from too much media coverage

Our anxiety may be heightened if we are exposed to excessive negative media coverage.

### Practicing self-care

We can protect our physical and mental health by healthy eating, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting a good amount of sleep, and doing regular exercise. Spending time outdoors can help lift our mood and improve our concentration.

### Developing a daily routine to cope with feelings of boredom

A good routine is balanced and incorporates a mix of work, rest and play. During isolation we may wish to do more of the things we enjoy, or learn a new hobby or skill.

### Acknowledging our feelings and sharing them with others

This can be very beneficial for our mental health. We may also wish to 'check in' on our loved ones to provide them with support. There are many things we can still do to stay connected with family and friends (e.g. phone calls, letters, text messages, emails, video chat, or social media).

### Learning stress management

For example, relaxation exercises involving deep breathing, muscle relaxation, yoga, meditation, mindfulness and music.

### Seeking professional assistance

Professionals such as General Practitioners, psychologists and counsellors provide support to people who are finding it difficult to cope with the stress resulting from COVID-19.



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