

# Psychologists offer tips and resources for coping during COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic has quickly and drastically changed day-to-day life in the U.S., causing fear and anxiety. Loyola Medicine clinical psychologists Elizabeth Simmons, PsyD, and Laura Wool, PsyD, provide tips for coping, as well as resources for securing additional help and care, in two, new Loyola Medicine videos:

"Practical tips for staying positive during COVID-19" and "Coping during COVID-19."

Simmons and Wool say it's important to allow yourself to feel [anxiety](#) and fear during this stressful and unprecedented time. While "nobody likes to feel anxious or scared," says Wool, it's important to "work on inviting those feelings in," while also realizing that those feelings can coexist with other, more [positive feelings](#).

"You can feel anxious and have fun with your kids," says Simmons. "You can feel uncertain about what's coming next and find comfort in playing with your dog or going out for a walk with your dog. You don't need to get rid of that anxiety in order to also feel joy, happiness and calm."

## **Tips for staying positive**

To help maintain an emotional balance, Simmons and Wool recommend:

- Choosing activities that make you feel good. These can include "calling a friend, taking a walk, listening to music, reading a book, engaging in a craft," says Wool.
- Checking the facts. "At a time like this, when we really don't know what's coming next," says Simmons, "it's important to check the facts," or "decatastrophizing," keeping a check on our thoughts and focusing on the information that we have access to "and what it's telling us."
- Focusing on what you do have control over. "When people are feeling a loss of control, focusing on what you do have control over can be very helpful," says Wool. For example, "following the strong recommendation right now to socially distance yourself can feel very empowering."
- Maintaining a regular sleep/wake cycle and daily routine. "We

take for granted that we have these built-in routines in our lifestyle in terms of getting up in the morning and getting dressed," says Simmons. It's important to continue to wake up and go to bed at the same times every day.

- Taking walks and getting outside. "Make sure that you're not too sedentary," say Wool. Get up, take walks and "try to get outside for 10 minutes every day."
- Practicing simple breathing exercises to stay calm. "Simple breathing exercises where you count your breaths, and pause between each inhale and exhale, can help slow things down and help calm anxiety."
- Watching what you eat. Make sure that you are eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, and that you are not eating too many processed foods, says Wool.
- Maintaining social connections by phone and video. "We know that body language facilitates a lot of the connection we experience socially," says Simmons. "The more you can see people's faces, the more you can see people smiling, the more that will combat the loneliness factor" of this pandemic.
- Taking a moment to be mindful. "Mindfulness helps you stay in the present moment," says Wool. She said there are apps, such as Headspace, Insight Timer, and Calm that can help with mindfulness.

## **When coping is difficult or impossible**

Simmons and Wool explain that for some individuals, the stress of COVID-19 may result in prolonged or acute feelings of depression and/or anxiety, which may require additional resources and/or immediate professional help.

"When you notice that for a significant period of time, let's say at least two weeks, that you are starting to just feel down or depressed all day

every day, or you're noticing that the anxiety is at a level that is really starting to impair your sleep and your appetite—you're sleeping less or sleeping more, or eating less or eating more," says Wool. Or, "you are starting to feel hopeless, having thoughts of suicide, or noticing an increase in substance use, "that would be a time to either reach out to a local hotline or to reach out to your primary care provider for a referral."

If you have a plan or intent to harm yourself, or others, please call 911, says Wool and Simmons.

## Additional resources

- Disaster Distress Helpline: Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 800-273-8255 or [Chat with Lifeline](#)
- Crisis Textline: Text TALK to 741741
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) COVID-19 Information and Resources](#)
- [The CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) webpage, "Manage Anxiety & Stress"](#)
- [American Psychological Association "Psychology Help Center"](#)

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