

Knowledge is power: Learning more about COVID-19 can reduce your pandemic stress

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A new study from North Carolina State University and the Georgia Institute of Technology finds that the more people know about COVID-19, the less pandemic-related stress they have. The study also

found that making plans to reduce stress was also effective for older adults—but not for adults in their 40s or younger.

"COVID-19 is a new disease—it's not something that people worried about before," says Shevaun Neupert, a professor of psychology at NC State and co-author of the study. "So we wanted to see how people were responding to, and coping with, this new source of [stress](#)."

To that end, researchers surveyed 515 adults from across the United States. The adults ranged in age from 20-79. The cohort of study participants had an average age of just under 40, and 46 of them were more than 60 years old. The surveys were conducted between March 20 and April 19, 2020.

One part of the survey was a 29-item quiz designed to assess how much study participants knew about COVID-19. Coupled with other elements of the survey, this let researchers assess whether an understanding of COVID-19 made people feel more stress or less.

"We found that knowledge is power," Neupert says. "The more factual information people knew about COVID-19, the less stress they had. That was true across age groups.

"Knowledge reduces uncertainty, and uncertainty can be very stressful," Neupert says. "Although speculative, it is likely that knowledge about this new virus reduced uncertainty, which in turn reduced feelings of pandemic stress."

The researchers went into the study thinking [older adults](#) would likely experience more stress related to COVID-19, because the disease was portrayed as particularly dangerous to seniors. But they found that pandemic-related stress levels were the same for all age groups.

"The strongest predictor of stress was concern about getting COVID-19, which isn't surprising," says Neupert. "And the older people were, the more pronounced this effect was."

But older adults also had an advantage: pro-active coping. The use of proactive coping—or making plans to reduce the likelihood of stress—reduced stress in adults over the age of 52. It had no effect for younger adults.

"These results suggest that everyone can benefit from staying engaged with [factual information](#) that will increase [knowledge](#) about COVID-19," Neupert says. "In addition, older adults who are able to use proactive coping, such as trying to prepare for adverse events, could decrease their pandemic stress."

More information: Ann Pearman, et al. Age Differences in Risk and Resilience Factors in COVID-19-Related Stress, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbaa120](https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa120)

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