

# Emotional exhaustion during times of unrest

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Local and world events have brought out strong emotions and stressors this year, often one right after another. They include COVID-19, social distancing, quarantines, stay-at-home orders, furloughs, job loss, masking, racial injustice, protests and demonstrations. There's no question 2020 has been a year full of change and trauma.

In addition to social unrest, you may be experiencing a high-pressure job, [financial stress](#) or poverty, being a caregiver, [raising children](#), chronic illness or death of a family member or friend.

You may be wondering what's next or what else you will have to endure. As these events unfold, you may begin to feel unwell and irritable, and struggle to concentrate and motivate yourself. You may not even know what is causing how you are feeling. You can feel trapped or stuck. You're emotionally exhausted.

## What is emotional exhaustion?

When [stress](#) begins to accumulate from negative or challenging events in life that just keep coming, you can find yourself in a state of feeling emotionally worn out and drained. This is called emotional exhaustion. For most people, emotional exhaustion tends to slowly build up over time. Emotional exhaustion includes emotional, physical and performance symptoms.

Emotional symptoms include:

- Anxiety
- Apathy
- Depression
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling powerless or trapped
- Irritability
- Lack of motivation
- Nervousness
- Tearfulness
- Physical symptoms include: Fatigue
- Headaches
- Lack of appetite

- Sore muscles or muscle tension
- Performance symptoms include: Failing to meet deadlines
- Lower workplace commitment
- More absences
- Performing work duties more slowly

## Emotional Exhaustion Treatment

Emotional exhaustion can be treated by recognizing the stressors you are able to minimize or eliminate. When you are unable to change a stressor because it is out of your control, it is important to focus on the [present moment](#). In your present, there are many neutral or positive events occurring. When you focus on these types of events, it gives perspective about what is happening around you.

Stress often is interpreted as a threat to survival. When this happens, it increases the release of stress hormones from your brain, further contributing to your experience of emotional exhaustion. When you are able to focus on small neutral or positive events, your brain is able to understand that the threat is not as dire as it may first seem. The amount of stress hormone released is decreased so you are able to feel more emotionally balanced.

Other strategies to reduce emotional exhaustion include:

- Eliminate or minimize the stressor when possible
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- Exercise
- Get enough sleep
- Practice mindfulness to engage in the present moment

Talk with a mental health provider if you believe that you are suffering from [emotional exhaustion](#). They can help you sort through the causes

and symptoms you are experiencing to determine a plan that will help you regain a sense of well-being.

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