

Coping with the stress of this election

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a stressed girl

(HealthDay)—Americans who woke up this morning to an undecided Presidential election might rightfully be feeling lots of anxiety, both about their personal futures as well as the fate of the nation.

There are plentiful jokes online about drinking election stress away, but mental health experts instead are urging healthier ways to cope with the anxiety of a country on the edge.

First and foremost: Keep to your established schedule, and don't allow yourself to fixate on the constant stream of news emanating from the TV and [social media](#).

"We're kind of in the trenches right now," said Dr. Vivian Pender, president-elect of the American Psychiatric Association. "We're looking at the small minute-by-minute picture. And it's good sometimes to rise above that and step back or refocus on something else."

Brittany LeMonda, a senior neuropsychologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, said, "At this point, nobody has control over the outcome. Recognizing that control is out of our hands can be a positive experience for some people. We can shift away from the news and media, and hitting refresh every five minutes, and maybe do some things that put our minds at ease and are peaceful to us."

Maintaining your regular daily schedule—work, play, exercise, meals—will provide some structure to your life and help you manage your election stress, said Dr. Deborah Marin, director of Mount Sinai's Center for Stress, Resilience and Personal Growth.

"If you have a schedule that works for you, don't let this election derail it because we cannot control this anymore," Marin said. "It's done. The counts are going on. If we can't control the election, let's at least try to take control of what we know works for us."

Try to fit in at least some [physical activity](#) in your day, because moving your body can do wonders for your mind, Marin added.

"Physical activity has a tremendous effect on our brain, not just in terms of our mood and anxiety, but also our cognition," Marin said. "Our brains really like aerobic activity. It's amazing the impact. Exercising twice a week can help mitigate minor depression."

Engage in other activities that help relax you as well, LeMonda suggested, like cooking, cleaning, reading or indulging a creative pursuit.

Any sort of spiritual or mind-body practice can also help quite a bit, whether you're attending a religious service, taking a yoga class or simply enjoying a long walk in the sunshine, LeMonda and Marin said.

"It's a really good time to take a step back and think about what might reduce your own personal stress, what might put your mind at ease a little bit, and then make a plan to engage in that activity," LeMonda said. "Put the phone down, turn off the television, don't go on social media for a few hours and just do something to take your mind off it."

Reaching out to people and socially connecting is another way to help process the uncertainty everyone faces, the experts said.

"One of the best ways of dealing with stress and anxiety is to talk to people," said Pender, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College, in New York City.

Even though it might be difficult, Pender recommends that you even try to talk with family and friends who don't share your political views.

"Even if you disagree, maybe especially now, talk with people you disagree with, because we have to come together somehow and the best way of doing that is to talk with each other," Pender added. "With people who agree with you, you can sort of commiserate, but I think it may be even more important to talk with people who don't agree with

you. That way, you can hear the other side and try to reconcile. It isn't this endless loop of echo chamber that people have been in on one side or another."

In these talks, people should try to focus on whatever bright sides they can imagine, especially if there are young children in the home, said Dr. Victor Fornari, vice chair of child & adolescent psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, N.Y.

"Maintaining a sense of hope and optimism is critical," Fornari said. "We need to temper our outward expression of anxiety in order to prevent it from having a contagious effect upon those around us, particularly our children."

And whatever you do, don't follow the advice of the online jokes and hit the liquor store, Pender said.

"Be careful about misusing alcohol or tobacco or drugs, or even prescription drugs. That could be what seems like an easy way of dealing with the stress right now, but it's not a good way of doing it," she added.

Just take a deep breath, and focus on what's good for you in this moment, the experts advised.

"Eventually, this will come to an end and we will have an answer, whether it's an answer we're happy with or unhappy with," LeMonda said. "A lot of times the anxiety leading up to a big monumental outcome can be worse to some degree than even the reality of the outcome. This might be the worst part of this whole process, believe it or not, living in this sort of back and forth, but it will pass."

More information: There's more on coping with stress at the [American Psychological Association](#).

SOURCES: Vivian Pender, MD, president-elect, American Psychiatric Association; Brittany LeMonda, PhD, senior neuropsychologist, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; Deborah Marin, MD, director, Mount Sinai's Center for Stress, Resilience and Personal Growth, New York City; Victor Fornari, MD, vice chair, child & adolescent psychiatry, Zucker Hillside Hospital, Glen Oaks, N.Y.

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