

Stressed out by Ukraine news? Experts offer coping tips

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The stories and images flowing out of [Ukraine](#) as it defends itself against

a Russian invasion are gut-wrenching: Families lugging just a suitcase while crossing the border to safety in Poland in tears; bombed out apartments with people still hiding amid the wreckage; unlucky citizens losing their lives in the crossfire of war.

This steady stream of tragedies from across the world is breaking the hearts of many Americans, so experts offer coping advice.

Start by reducing your exposure to what's happening in Ukraine by limiting how much news you consume and turning off app notifications.

"Veterans, especially those with diagnosed or undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder [[PTSD](#)], may especially be triggered by these scenes," said Dr. Michelle Riba, a psychiatrist at Michigan Medicine-University of Michigan.

"If you have [young children](#) around, it's important to share what's going on in terms they can understand, but shield them from seeing too much on a TV that happens to be on while they're near," Riba added. "If they see the same footage played repeatedly, they may think the events are happening over and over again, which we saw with 9/11 and other major events."

Reduce your social media exposure and help [younger people](#) do the same. Talk to teens about how repeated exposure to this kind of unfiltered content can be overwhelming or numbing, and how information from crisis zones can often be inaccurate or incomplete.

Try to focus on the humanitarian spirit triggered by the crisis. Doing so can reaffirm your faith in humanity, experts say.

"It's heartening to see the response—even places that haven't welcomed refugees are opening their arms," said Dr. Michele Heisler, an internal

medicine physician at Michigan Medicine. "I've been inspired by the global outpouring, and the courage of Ukrainians, and it's important to reflect on the humanity we're seeing and allow it to expand our own hearts. We're all human beings."

What can you do to help?

Donate to reputable organizations helping Ukrainians, such as UNICEF, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders, the International Rescue Committee, the International Committee of the Red Cross, World Central Kitchen and CARE. But be wary of individual crowdfunding sites and independent fundraising efforts because they have less accountability and could even be scams.

Help [refugees](#) from Afghanistan and other countries who are already in your area. Each state has charitable organizations that coordinate resettlement for refugees, and they would welcome donations of food, toiletries, clothing, shoes, furniture, household goods and skilled assistance.

"We've been in the midst of an era of refugee crises, and I hope the Ukraine crisis makes us all think about the suffering of other people who have to flee persecution, and how we can help," said Heisler, who is also the medical director of Physicians for Human Rights, an [international health](#) and human rights organization.

"This is the most 'wired' conflict that we've ever experienced as a global, connected society, and now that your heart is going out in this situation, think about other situations that have sent people fleeing from their homeland," she said in a university news release.

And for your own benefit, support your mental health with good sleep habits, [physical activity](#), [healthy eating](#), avoiding alcohol and other

substances, connecting virtually or in-person with people you enjoy spending time with, writing in a journal or reading a book, meditating, listening to soothing music or doing creative activities.

If you suffer from depression, anxiety or PTSD, or you're concerned that you may have symptoms of these conditions, it's important to seek help, Heisler advised.

"[Vicarious trauma](#) is very real," Heisler said. "Watching this unfold is traumatic, and so is the sense of unfairness of being safe ourselves while others suffer. Take care of yourself."

More information: A Ukraine Crisis Appeal has been launched by [UNICEF](#).

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