

Social Isolation, Stress and Anxiety in a Time of Uncertainty

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These are unusual times...something that most of us have never experienced.

While we are all dealing with social distancing, we must try to maintain our social relationships. Our friendships and family are so important during these stressful times.

Maintaining Relationships

How can we maintain these relationships? Popular programs include Facebook, Zoom, Google Hangouts or Instagram, however other great ways include sending email, just picking up the telephone and calling, or even going old school, and writing a letter. Who doesn't enjoy a phone call or getting a letter in the mail? My daughter, who is a college senior, just received a letter of appreciation and I miss you from her college roommate. While it may seem silly to the younger generation, it is still appreciated by all generations.

Changes and Challenges

The "Stay at Home" orders issued in many states have changed the way we work, shop, and eat. The way we shop changed so much in a short time. We went from going to the store to pick up a few items here and there, to ordering groceries online for a week or two at a time. Now, if we go to the store for items, we are wearing a mask and taking hand sanitizer and wiping down the carts.

Just going out to the store or pharmacy can cause stress and anxiety, even for those that have never experienced anxiety issues or panic attacks. In the National Institute of Health [director's blog](#) from April 7, 2020, he discussed how this new reality can send us "over the edge" and make us feel anxious in ways we have never experienced. The [director of NIH's National Institute of Mental Health](#) ^[1], discussed his own experience with a panic attack when he needed to go out to the grocery store. He planned his trip, found a mask and gloves to wear, but when he got to the store, he started having a panic attack. He bought only a few things and had to leave. He explained the feelings of his "heart racing" and starting to breathe fast and he knew it was more than he could handle.



Feelings

These are feelings that many are experiencing, and some may not recognize as the start of a panic attack. You may experience mild symptoms and find that you can deal with it on your own. It is important to recognize signs that you are not able to deal with this on your own. Is your anxiety affecting your ability to function or get things done? There are other ways that anxiety and stress can affect us, such as withdrawing from people, disrupted sleep patterns, appetite changes, changes in energy levels, and irritability or anger.

It is important to recognize the signs and seek help. Telehealth is a great option for help, doctors' offices are trying to keep healthy patients healthy. If you do not have a computer or smartphone, there are also helplines to assist those in need.

Local and National Helpline:

- Friendly Phone Line from Age Friendly Columbus (for those looking for friendly conversation and social connection (M-F, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.): 614-993-3614
- Ohio Crisis Text Line: Text *4Hope* to 741741
- Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services Help Line: 877-275-6364
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 800-985-5990
- Disaster Distress Helpline: Text *TalkWithUs* to 66746

The challenges we are facing, due to the Novel Coronavirus, allow us to learn more about our ability to cope and give us time for self-reflection.

We will get through this; we can help each other through this.

We are all in this together.

References

[1] "Dealing with Stress, Anxiety and Grief during COVID-19" – NIH Director's Blog – April 7, 2020