

Suffering Alone from Covid-19 Stress?



Acceptance may be the solution

“Unprecedented” is how many describe COVID-19 because our culture has nothing to compare with the devastating levels of fear and change. The coronavirus crisis is different from other community crisis events like hurricanes, economic recessions, or mass shootings like the Pulse massacre because it just goes on and on.

This prolonged exposure to uncertainty, fears of being laid-off, coupled with trying to home school while working from home or searching for toilet paper and hand sanitizer can be mentally numbing. Not to mention the very real risk of a disease described by Surgeon General Jerome Adams as *“ten times more contagious than the flu.”*

The traumatic stress of coronavirus and the extended lock down can be emotionally overwhelming to many, especially the aged, children and those over-exposed to negative media. This pandemic has been one of the most stressful experiences many Americans have experienced, yet one of the greatest risks beyond contracting coronavirus are the huge spikes in emotional and mental pressures building during the shut-down.

Consider if any of these COVID stress symptoms apply-

- ***Panic about the future***
- ***Career anxiety about employment***
- ***Insurance loss if laid off and the possibility of no healthcare for your family***
- ***Financial ruin from mounting debts***
- ***Impulsive actions after weeks of lock down***
- ***Crushing loneliness from social isolation***
- ***Painful grief over no school graduations, family birthdays or vacations together***
- ***Missed connections with friends, coworkers, and aging family members***
- ***Feeling helpless and hopeless about the future***
- ***Physical exhaustion and mental depletion***

The coronavirus redefined reality as '*normal*' died on March 11. That is the date the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic called Covid-19. There will be no '*new normal*', after that date - only a new reality. Normal is over forever.

Why such a gloomy prediction?

It is based on how this extended global crisis has been overwhelming with stock markets crashing, entire industries like tourism and travel ceasing, never ending information and sad stories about the risk of disease compounded by confusing choices to make on complex financial issues like student loans, mortgages, health insurance and credit card debt. If these challenges were not enough, frustrated people are shouting their opinions and fears at you through every form of social media.

The Sky is not Falling

Have you noticed how many conspiracy theories have popped up? It's like the



children's story of Chicken Little screaming "*the sky is falling*" when he didn't have the full picture that was not the case. Crisis brings fear out of some people and the worst out of others. When things do not make sense, some people shift to blaming or attacking to feel in control of their situation by attempting to explain what is happening. Bad information is better than no information they reason. Rumors abound right now about coronavirus being caused by 5G electromagnetic radiation, Big Pharma, or Bill Gates, (*who gave a Ted talk about pandemics in 2015*), another is the virus was created in a lab as a biological weapon to destroy the economy.

One of the wildest conspiracies is Covid -19 does not even exist – that it is only a rumor being used by government to take away individual freedoms. By the time you read this someone will have posted more rumors and wild conspiracies- make the decision now not to believe it.

Mostly because it will not make you feel better and will only take energy away from your primary goal in a major crisis. Staying safe and keeping your family safe.

Believe facts about COVID-19, not rumors. For trusted information to keep your family physically and medically safe visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>

Crisis comes in like a tsunami

Think of the pandemic as a monster sized wave of emotion. A literal tsunami of fear, doubt, confusion, chaos, and change. The wave is coming fast – so what to do? No matter how fast you try to escape it – waves of painful emotions will catch you and try to pull you down.



How to not drown in this dangerous current of fear? Breathe. Stop thinking about all the fears and doubts and confusion of the past or future to think about flowing with the challenges of today only. Give up on fighting the surge of everything happening and changing at once. COVID-19 will end. This pandemic will be over one day. Scientists will find a vaccine and life will go on. The danger for many people now is getting caught in the ‘rip current’ of emotions and being sucked down in the process.

No one was completely prepared for the emotional upheaval of a global pandemic. Not everyone was infected, but everyone was impacted. Young and old will feel a surge of emotions once the lock down is over and

they can gradually go back to previous routines like shopping, eating out or going to church. The emotional pressure will impact people differently. Some will race to theme parks and beaches as if they were inmates being set free from prison. Others will be more cautious, perhaps even afraid to go outdoors even after Governor DeSantis says it is safe to do so. The surge of depressing emotions may keep them inside for some time to come. Fear can be immobilizing. Those feelings of distress can be dangerous and may come out in several ways.

Common reactions to covid-19 stress

1. Anxiety

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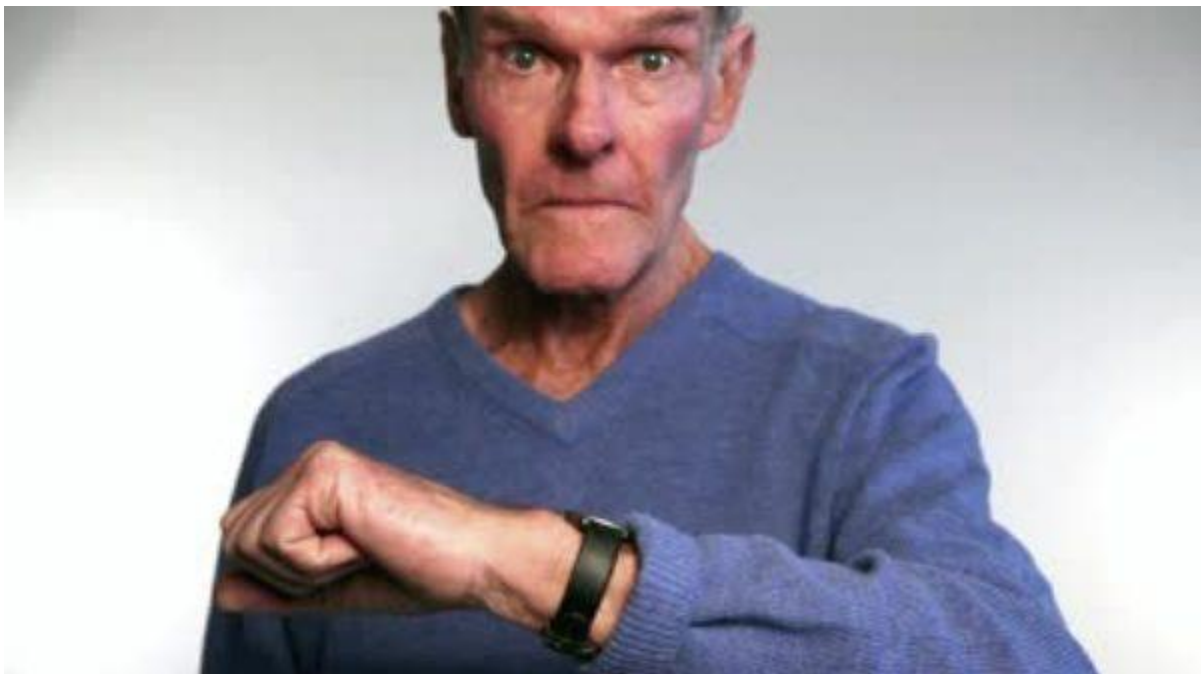
Which is the most common psychological reaction to a major crisis like this pandemic. These are uncertain times as governments, schools, stock markets, businesses and travel have temporarily ended.

It is normal to be concerned about the unknown and equally normal to want to feel back in control. To ignore dangerous situations is unhealthy since having a degree of fear will keep you safe, *(think of trying to cross a busy*



street at a crosswalk – you continually look both ways to not be hit by a car).

Continual exposure to fear can lead to worry and the inability to stop thinking about a worst-case scenario instead of thinking creatively to solve stress. Moving from fearful thinking to finding healthy alternatives to boost emotional energy can be sparked with something as simple as a deep breath. *“Breathe in faith - breathe out fear”* is a trusted process to accomplish that goal. Finding creative ways to release the anxiety is a better use of emotional energy and will lead to a positive outcome.



2. Anger –

Which can lead to violence and impulsive decisions. People who feel violated by the covid-19 lock down or being laid off often turn to dumping volcanic levels of

anger to find relief for the pressure they feel inside. This can lead to devastating decisions, abuse of the people they say they love, impulsive fits of rage or using the wrong words in front of their boss and losing a job during a recession. This can happen in men or women, young or old, as evidenced by the spike in 911 telephone calls to respond to domestic violence during the COVID lock down. Anger tends to blow up fast and then blow out just as fast like a blast of hostility. Remember, a simmering pot will always boil over, so moody, and frustrated people need to be encouraged to find healthy outlets as to not hurt themselves or others. Quiet brooding anger is still anger and finding a healthy outlet through journaling or exercise is a better choice to stay mentally healthy without hurting others.

3. Apathy –

This is a more dangerous reaction since it can flow from feelings of distress to the early stages of depression or despair. Stuffing emotions inside is like burying them alive and they just keep building up, yet instead of blowing up and out, these people tend to blow all the pressures in. They may act like a “*Superman*” who feels no pain, when in reality they have a “*Kryptonite*” of failures and fears tucked inside.

They may attack themselves as ‘dumb’ or ‘stupid’ for not buying enough toilet paper, or not seeing how coronavirus would change our world.



Weeks of caregiving of kids, pets or elderly family can lead a person to feel emotionally numb. This can cause some individuals to commit a series of very quiet,

yet very harmful self-destructive acts.

Eating for comfort, drinking to numb the pain, addictions like gambling or pornography, or high-risk behavior like hooking up with the wrong partner to escape and ignore their uncertain future. It is hard to face the changes in our country, but ignoring finances, refusing to answer the phone, closing the mini-blinds and checking out like a hermit hiding in a dark cave will not make the realities of COVID-19 go away.

Do the opposite to battle emotional numbness. Check your bank and credit card statements. Face creditors and reach back to friends texting or calling to check-in. You did not cause the crisis, but you can make the situation better by facing it.

What is the strongest choice to shatter COVID stress?

Acceptance-

COVID-19 is here, and you cannot escape. Our world is in the midst of a global health crisis and you must accept that to move forward with courage about whatever the future holds. You cannot change the reality of a pandemic, but you do not have to freak yourself out with speculative

fears about a future apocalypse, which only makes things worse. Life will go on and your world will continue.



Learn from those who survived global crisis events like World War Two or the Great Depression. They faced the difficulty directly and found a way forward. You can too. Take a breath and think about peace instead of panic. Trust that others have faced impossible situations and found resilience and strength. Ignore the doomsayers and you will immediately find a deeper level of peace. What happens on Wall Street isn't as important as what happens on your street. You cannot control what happens

in a global pandemic, but you can practice healthy self-care to build mental wellness and strength despite the stress.

Taking care of you and your part of the world is a good place to start in moving forward. Remember the words of the serenity prayer that carries millions of people forward every day,

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can and Wisdom to know the difference.”

Let this journey through a pandemic be one of a growing sense of perspective. Waves, even giant ones will pass.

There will be school next year. Thanksgiving will still be at the end of November and you still will not like your aunt’s fruitcake. Baseball will be back, along with football, basketball, golf, NASCAR, and love bugs.

When the dust of a major crisis settles your life will usually be about as good as you choose to make it.

You can breathe and face the new reality, or you can stay scared. Empowerment, mental strength, and resiliency grow when you face your fears directly. This approach takes the power to control your moods away from an

invisible virus so you can build a better life for you, your kids and family without losing sleep or energy.

You become bigger than your fears when you confront covid-19 stress with acceptance, peace, and courage. That is the great hope of the serenity prayer. Not that your circumstances changed, rather that you did.



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