



## **COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:**

### **COPING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS**

**Version 2, 4/20/20**

It is common and normal to feel stressed or anxious during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the uncertainty of the current situation and all the changes that are happening so quickly. The pandemic may be even more stressful for those individuals who struggle with mental illness and for individuals with mental health problems who also have financial difficulties or medical problems. In addition to dealing with the physical danger posed by the virus, if you have a mental illness, you may find it particularly challenging to cope with increased feelings of stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, and isolation. As a result, you may find it difficult to manage your mental health symptoms and stay stable due to the stress and lack of usual support and resources. You may even experience a worsening of your mental health symptoms. In addition, there is some suggestion that people with serious mental health problems may be at increased risk for COVID-19 infection because they may have certain other risk factors for the virus, like medical problems, high rates of smoking, high rates of homelessness, limited health insurance, and limited social circles. So it is important to remember that if you have mental health problems, you are not alone. You are part of a larger caring community that help reduce your negative feelings and bring you comfort. So even as we are all encouraged to distance ourselves from others physically, it is important to continue to remotely build and expand the networks of social support that make you strong and empower you. Even when you feel distress, have more symptoms, or you don't have full control of a situation, there are things you can do. To help you cope to the best of your ability during this challenging time, here are some tips for healthy strategies to effectively manage your mental health symptoms. Helpful resources are also included.

#### **Develop and Follow a Wellness Plan**

- Practice good hygiene
  - Wash your hands frequently, especially after you touch something, as many surfaces can pick up the virus
  - Avoid touching your face unless you have washed your hands
  - Check out the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) website for more tips



- Protect yourself and others physically
  - Maintain a distance from others of at least 6 feet
  - Avoid going to public spaces
  - Stay home and only make essential trips (e.g., groceries, medical services).
  - Delay non-essential appointments (e.g., haircuts, nail salon)
- Take care of your physical well-being
  - Call your healthcare provider if you feel sick or are worried that you have symptoms of COVID-19
- Adopt a routine that supports your recovery and ensures that your mental health needs are met
  - Maintain routines that make you feel good
  - Modify routines as necessary while trying to remain active (e.g., if you usually go to the gym or take a fitness class, you can exercise where you live)
- Exercise
  - Try walking outside (while maintaining physical distancing), stretching, or taking advantage of online exercise videos
  - Get creative with finding ways to stay active
  - Find an activity that includes movement such as dance or exercise apps
  - Get outside in an area that makes it easy to maintain distance from people, such as a nature trail or your own backyard
- Get plenty of sleep
  - Remember that getting regular exercise and avoiding caffeine can improve the quality of your sleep
  - Use Apps or YouTube videos to help you sleep
- Eat regular and healthy meals
  - Try to eat at least one fresh or frozen fruit or vegetable with every meal
  - Avoid loading up on junk food, refined sugar, or caffeine



- Avoid alcohol, nicotine, vaping or drugs that are not prescribed
- Engage in hobbies
  - Find activities you find enjoyable and make them part of your daily routine
  - Try reading or listening to audiobooks, writing, painting, drawing, cooking, or listening to music

### **Prioritize Your Mental Health**

- Continue with your current medication
  - Make sure you have enough medication
  - Plan ahead by contacting your provider and discussing medication refills to ensure you do not run out of medication
  - Ask for a 90-day supply of all essential psychiatric medications
- Continue with your ongoing counseling or psychotherapy
  - Talk to your provider on the telephone or using telehealth/video chat applications for your upcoming appointments so you and your provider can practice physical distancing to keep yourselves safe
- Recognize and manage stress to support your mental health
  - Try using relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing
  - Set aside time for yourself to do something relaxing that helps quiet your mind, reduces your anxiety, and makes you feel more refreshed
- Recognize and get help for early warning signs of distress
  - Notice if you are having changes in your sleep or appetite, feeling sad or too happy, feeling extra irritable, worrying all the time, having problems concentrating, or having difficulties getting along with people
  - Contact your mental health provider for assistance if you notice warning signs



- Reach out for extra mental health support during this time
  - Call a Warmline (emotional support phoneline)
    - Peer2Peer WarmLine: 888-945-1414
    - Georgia COVID-19 Emotional Support Line: 866-399-8938
    - CARES Warm Line: 1-844-326-5400
  - Consider Peer-led online support groups provided by local organizations such as the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network: [www.gmhcn.org/online-wellness-resources](http://www.gmhcn.org/online-wellness-resources)
- Call a crisis hotline if you experience a crisis/mental health emergency
  - Call a local hotline (e.g., Georgia Crisis Hotline: 1-800-715-4225)
  - Call national hotlines or crisis lines
    - National Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990
    - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
    - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Spanish): 1-888-628-9454
    - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Deaf & Hard of Hearing Options): 1-800-799-4889
    - Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255
  - Text national hotlines or crisis text lines
    - National Disaster Distress Helplines: Text TalkWithUs to 66746
    - Crisis Text and Support Line: Text MHA to 741741
  - Dial 911

### **Manage your Anxiety**

- Gain knowledge
  - Make sure to get your information from a trusted news source, like the



Centers for Disease Control: [CDC](#)

- Limit the time you spend checking the news for updates, constantly watching, listening, or reading the news right now can be distressing
  - Choose times of the day to get news updates
- Remember that anxiety is normal, so don't worry about it unless your anxiety gets so bad that you start to panic or have a hard time functioning
- Try to limit your worry time
  - Set aside a specific and limited time to worry each day
  - Write down your worries during that time
  - Outside of your worry time, keep busy to avoid worrying
- Avoid anxiety triggers
- Focus on positive thoughts
- Set priorities
  - Set realistic goals for each day
  - Outline steps to reach these goals
  - Praise yourself for every step in the right direction, no matter how small
  - Be kind to yourself and remember that some days you will accomplish more than others
- Take time each day to think about, write about, or share the things you are grateful for

### **Maintain Social Support**

- Remember physical distancing does not mean social isolation, so connect with people
- Find a COVID-19 support buddy
  - Check in with each other regularly
  - Have a plan if you can't reach your buddy or they can't reach you



- Reach out to family, friends, or coworkers with regular phone calls, or if possible, by using virtual hangouts (e.g., Facetime, Skype)
- Let people know if you need extra support or understanding from them
- Reach out and connect with your spiritual community
  - Contact a spiritual leader or someone in your faith community
  - Stream religious/spiritual services online
- Do something for others
  - Find purpose in helping the people around you
  - Email, text or call to check on your friends, family members and neighbors (e.g., older adults)

### **Helpful Resources**

- NAMI COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide: [www.nami.org/covid-19](http://www.nami.org/covid-19)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/mental-health-and-psychosocial-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus>
- Mental Health America: <https://mhanational.org/covid19>
- National Institutes of Health: <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus>