

## **How do pandemics like the current COVID-19 affect mental health?**

The outbreak of coronavirus 2019 has been stressful and can trigger anxiety about both our and our loved ones' health, financial stability, job security, and managing childcare and work obligations, especially for those who may have an underlying anxiety, obsessive compulsive, or other mood disorder. Measures taken to mitigate viral spread, e.g. working from home and avoiding social gatherings, can also predispose to feelings of isolation and depression. Stress reactions can vary depending on a person's age, personality, medical history, personal background and unique life experiences.

## **What are common symptoms of psychological stress?**

Stress associated with the current COVID-19 pandemic can manifest in some of the following ways:

- 1. difficulty sleeping;
- 2. problems concentrating;
- 3. changes in appetite or eating patterns;
- 4. intense fear or worry about your own, the health of your loved ones, or other concerns stemming from the social and economic impact of the current pandemic;
- 5. increase in alcohol, drug use, or other maladaptive and potentially destructive behaviors;
- 6. less attention paid to self care and routine hygiene;
- 7. feelings of panic with associated physical manifestations of anxiety, e.g. racing heart, shortness of breath, and tremulousness;
- 8. depressed mood, inability to enjoy usual pleasurable activities, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness;
- 9. worsening obsessive thoughts or compulsive behaviors;
- 10. or possible symptoms of post-traumatic stress (e.g. being easily startled, experiencing nightmares or flashbacks, hypervigilance) for individuals who have or have had the infection along with others who have been exposed or at higher risk of exposure.

## **How can you support yourself and your loved ones?**

- 1. Take breaks each day from the news and other media covering the pandemic.
- 2. Make time for other activities you enjoy such as reading a novel, watching a movie, or engaging in your hobby.
- 3. Take care of your body (and mind) by exercising or meditating.
- 4. Minimize the effects of social isolation by connecting with family and friends through Face time or Skype.
- 5. Give yourself some outdoor time while practicing social distancing, e.g. kicking a soccer ball with your child.
- 6. Take time to see the silver lining, e.g. you or your partner may be able to work from home and to spend more quality time with your immediate family.
  - 7. Make a list of goals that you have always wanted to accomplish
  - 8. Be kind and help your friends and neighbors who are in need.
  - 9. Practice healthy social distancing if circumstances require you to leave your home.
  - 10. Remain hopeful and recognize we are all in this together!

## **For parents, first responders, healthcare providers, and those released from quarantine:**

- Parents and caregivers should provide their children with age appropriate emotional support and reassurance, explain why certain social activities like playdates or team sports are being postponed, and take advantage of this opportunity to reinforce good hygiene and teach about how to prevent the spread of infection.
- First responders and healthcare providers should be mindful of the risk of developing acute stress reactions or post-traumatic stress disorder when risking their own health in order to safeguard the health of others and consider reaching out for help if they are experiencing a high level of psychological stress.
- Individuals recently released from quarantine or patients who have recovered from COVID-19 may have to manage continued fear of their physical health and well-

being. These individuals, or those erroneously perceived as a health threat to others due to their ethnicity or national heritage, may face stigmatization and consequently experience a range of emotional distress.

### **Reach out to a mental healthcare provider**

If you develop subjectively distressing psychological symptoms, symptoms that are interfering with your normal daily routine and not improving over time, or close individuals have expressed concern about your emotional health;

Given the rise in cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus), we at **Hudson Psychiatric Associates, LLC** are continuing to offer full psychiatric services through telehealth for all residents in the states of New Jersey or New York.

For individuals who are best served by face-to-face evaluations and treatment such as services for young children, we sanitize our offices on a daily basis and clean toys used in play therapy between every patient. In order to provide the safest environment for patients and staff, we ask that parents who come to our physical office locations with their children practice good hygiene and thoroughly wash their hands. We also ask that all patients who are ill stay at home and if well enough have virtual sessions with their providers.

While we cannot predict the future regarding COVID-19, we can achieve a healthy sense of control and limit its impact on our daily lives through our own actions and of course by taking sensible precautions.

Stay healthy and vigilant,



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*Executive Director*



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