

# Dealing with Depression During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## You Should Know

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly caused abrupt changes in your daily life, disrupting your sense of stability, structure, and control. Even routine activities you once took for granted, such as grocery shopping, working out at the gym, or meeting a friend for coffee, have been disrupted. This time of uncertainty, combined with social distancing measures, might cause you to feel isolated, lonely, or depressed.

If you are already living with a current or past diagnosis of depression, this situation can feel even more overwhelming. The stressful life changes and losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can trigger or exacerbate depression symptoms like despair, helplessness, and hopelessness.

Check off any of the following symptoms of depression that have recurred or increased since the coronavirus outbreak:

- Decreased or increased appetite.
- Changes in energy and activity levels.
- Problems sleeping, such as insomnia or nightmares.
- Difficulty staying awake during the day or the desire to stay in bed all day.
- Physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, or skin rashes.
- Relying on alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to cope.
- Emotional detachment or numbness.
- Hopelessness about the future.
- Lack of purpose.
- Restlessness and irritability.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Crying for what seems like no reason.
- Feeling helpless or overwhelmed.
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

***If you are thinking of hurting yourself or killing yourself, call 9-1-1 or the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)***

## What to Do

Below are some suggested strategies to help manage your depression during this time. Although the situation can feel overwhelming, it is important to acknowledge that it is temporary and that things will slowly return to normal at some point.

**Identify resources that can provide assistance and support.** Think about the friends, family, clergy, healthcare providers, and others you trust who can support you when you are

depressed. Reach out to the people in your life who make you laugh or smile when you are feeling down. Write down their names and contact information here.

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**Get help from a professional.** If you already have a therapist, continue your treatment virtually using teletherapy. If you need to find a therapist, visit [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#), or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for a local referral to low- or no-cost services. You can also text the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) crisis line 24/7 by texting 741741. Additionally, there are several online psychotherapy providers such as [BetterHelp](#) or [TalkSpace](#).

**Connect to your social networks** on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media. Which social media platforms do you find most helpful for resources, advice, and inspiration?

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**Move your body.** Physical activity is important for your physical and mental health. The CDC encourages everyone who can safely go outside to enjoy fresh air (with safe distancing from others, of course). Taking a walk, run, or bike ride, or walking your dog around the neighborhood, can improve your mood and your energy level. If you prefer to exercise indoors, try working out to an online video, dance to music you enjoy, or use your own exercise equipment (treadmill, weights, etc.).

Which types of exercise do you enjoy, or would you like to start?

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**Stay connected with video conferencing.** Video conferencing using platforms like Zoom, Facetime, or Skype, have become the new way for people to socialize. While these platforms are not the same as seeing people in person, they give you the experience of interacting with people in real time. You can schedule regular meetings with friends and families, join support groups, and even have a virtual "happy hour" with co-workers.

How can you use video conferencing do get the experience of connecting with people?

**Center yourself.** Meditation, deep breathing, and relaxation exercises can help you feel calm. There are many apps and videos to guide you through short but effective meditations and breathing exercises. Listening to music or burning scented candles may also help soothe your body and mind. As you sit quietly, you might find that thoughts and feelings begin rising to the surface, which is normal. When this happens, it is important to acknowledge your emotions without judgment. You can say, “I feel sad,” or “I am lonely.”

What methods have you used in the past to center yourself, or which would you like to try?

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**Keep busy.** Participate in activities that provide fulfillment, accomplishment, or a simple distraction. These can range from projects like home repairs and decluttering a closet, to actions done for sheer enjoyment, like coloring, scrapbooking, binge-watching your favorite series, or working on the Great American Novel. Have a good laugh by watching a silly comedy, a comedian's standup routine, or some funny videos on YouTube or Facebook.

What activities are most effective in providing fulfillment, accomplishment, or distraction?

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**Are there additional strategies have you tried in the past to elevate your mood? List them.**

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Now, choose at least three strategies to try for the next week. It may be helpful to ask one or more of the supports you identified above to offer encouragement, motivation, and accountability. List your selected strategies here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Use the chart to rate the severity of your depression before and after you engage in your selected strategies. Use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not depressed at all, and 10 = severe depression; unable to function. Use the 'Notes' section to share your observations about your experiences.

Date	Depression Level Before (1-10)	Strategy/Activity	Depression Level After (1-10)	Notes

## Reflections on This Exercise

Which strategies did you find most effective in reducing your depression? Explain.

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Which resources and people did you find most supportive? Explain.

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Did you come up with other ways to cope with your depression? Describe.

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