

Emotional and Mental Health for Caregivers

Tips, tools and resources to help caregivers cope with the emotional and mental stress that comes with caregiving during the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 has changed our lives in all kinds of ways. Many of us are increasingly stressed and worried about our health. If you're a caregiver to someone else, your worry likely extends to their health and safety during this time as well.

It can be hard to cope with all of this, and some of the outlets we used in the past to handle stress — from exercising at the gym to long walks with a friend — may not be available during this time of social distancing. Fortunately, there are several resources that can help you take care of your emotional health while staying safely at home.

First: Recognize How You're Feeling

The Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA) encourages caregivers to express and deal with all of their emotions, especially the tough ones. Pay attention to how you're feeling, and try to identify the type (or types) of emotions you're experiencing. They may include:

- Ambivalence
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Boredom
- Crankiness
- Depression
- Embarrassment
- Exhaustion
- Fear
- Frustration
- Grief
- Guilt
- Impatience
- Irritability
- Jealousy
- Loneliness
- Loss
- Resentment
- Sadness

It's important to remember that these emotions are normal and not something to be ashamed of. The COVID-19 pandemic is an ever-evolving situation and leaves many of us feeling uncertain about the future. Our emotions can be deeply affected by such uncertainty.

Second: Take Action

Because many people are experiencing the same emotions that you are — you've probably heard "we're all in this together" a few times by now — there are several tools and resources available. To help ease worry, try any of the following:

- **Virtual mental health visits.** Consider scheduling a virtual visit with a licensed therapist or psychiatrist. Check with your health plan to see if virtual mental health is covered. If you already see a mental health provider, contact him or her to see if you can continue sessions by phone or (even better) video. You can also get support by calling the

UnitedHealthcare Help Line at **866-342-6892, TTY 711**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **Taking advantage of free exercise programs.** Many gyms and fitness pros are making at-home workout resources — including live-stream workout classes and complimentary app trials — available online, often at no cost.
- **Creating and following a healthy daily routine.** Keep your schedule consistent when it comes to meals and bedtime. Get enough sleep, aiming for 7-9 hours a night, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Maintain a healthy diet and try to be active with walks, yoga, gardening or other activities that allow you to stay at home or physically distant from others. Don't turn to alcohol as a way of handling stress. Carve out time during the day to take deep breaths, stretch or meditate.
- **Staying informed.** Knowing important information about the outbreak and learning how to be prepared can reduce stress and help calm anxieties. However, too much exposure to news coverage (i.e. more than an hour a day) can lead to greater feelings of anxiety or panic. Try to limit your research to reliable sources, such as the [CDC](#), the [World Health Organization](#) and [UnitedHealthcare](#). Keep up with recommendations from your local public health authorities.
- **Talking with your loved one.** Chances are, the person you're caring for is having similar feelings and fears. The Mental Health Foundation says, "talking about your feelings isn't a sign of weakness. It's part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy."

Easing Emotions of the Person You're Caring For

Trying to calm the fears of a loved one can be difficult in person. So it's not surprising that this can be even more difficult when you're physically distanced. For additional information on how to cope during COVID-19, visit samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness and caregiver.org/emotional-side-caregiving. You can also call the UnitedHealthcare Help Line at **866-342-6892, TTY 711**.

Help for Mental Health

Remember: This time of social distancing and quarantine is temporary, and you are not alone. It's normal to experience heightened emotions during an outbreak like COVID-19. However, if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for an extended period of time (several days in a row), the CDC recommends calling your health care provider. Call the UnitedHealthcare Help Line at **866-342-6892, TTY 711**, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can also find additional resources through UnitedHealthcare [here](#).

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coronavirus
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Sleep Data & Statistics

https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/data_statistics.html

Family Caregiver Alliance: Emotional Side of Caregiving

<https://www.caregiver.org/emotional-side-caregiving>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

<https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness>

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