

Care For Your Mental Health during the CoVID19 Infectious Disease Outbreak

Infectious disease outbreaks, including Coronavirus (COVID-19) created a new type of crisis with a great deal of uncertainty about the nature of the disease, its spread, and its impact. This will understandably, affect individuals' emotional and mental health wellbeing- even among those who have not been directly exposed to the disease. Reactions to a crisis can appear very different from person to person and can occur at any time. Please consider the following recommendations for promoting your mental wellbeing during this time.

Things you can do to support yourself:

1. Staying Informed. Obtain the latest information during an infectious disease outbreak from credible and reliable sources of information. Up-to-date, accurate recommendations regarding disease prevention, self and family care, and travel guidance can be found at the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- NAU Coronavirus updates page: <https://nau.edu/coronavirus/>

2. Limit media exposure. Turn off the television and/or alert messaging on your phone if it is increasing your distress. Exposure to media can be healthy or unhealthy, for some individuals knowing helps to feel a sense of control over the situation while for others it may reinforce anxiety and fear. Research has shown that excess media exposure to coverage of stressful events can result in negative outcomes, use trusted resources to gather the information you need then turn it off if it's causing stress.

3. Anticipate stress reactions. Emotional distress is common and normal in the context of uncertainty and potentially life-threatening situations, such as Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Recognize the signs of distress. Stress can present itself in different ways including physical, emotional, or cognitive ways. One common response for young adults is a feeling of invincibility and or emotional detachment which can lead to behaviors that May significantly increase risks.

Some other common reactions include:

- Excessive worry, hard to stop thinking about what happened
- Sleeping Issues; having trouble sleeping or staying asleep
- Hypervigilance; getting up to check the news or check on family
- Difficulty relaxing
- Muscle tension
- Increased alcohol, tobacco, or drug use
- Irritability with emotional outbursts
- Inability to feel pleasure
- Feeling detached or numb
- Changes in energy level
- Aches and pains
- Difficulties concentrating.

5. Try different strategies to reduce distress. Some strategies can include:

- a. Being prepared (e.g., developing a personal/ family plan for the outbreak).
- b. Educate yourself about preventive measures hand-washing technique, cough etiquette, to more complex medical recommendations for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.
- c. Talking to loved ones about worries and concerns, know that your feelings are normal and others may be experiencing them too. Connect with friends and family in novel ways if you're isolated. Connect with those you feel closest to for support.

- d. Schedule positive activities. Do things that are enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it. Like listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational texts are some simple ways to help manage emotions.
- e. Take time to renew your spirit through prayer, meditation or helping others
- f. Eat a balanced and nutritious diet
- g. Get enough sleep every night. We know sleep is restorative reduces anxiety, helps learning, helps problem solving, and allows the brain to rest. Even short periods of sleep deprivation can be troublesome.
- h. Engage in exercise as much as possible for overall good health and to help reduce stress too
- i. If possible stick to your usual daily routine.

Helpful Online Resources: <https://in.nau.edu/campus-health-services/resources-and-forms/>

For most people stress reactions will lessen over the first few weeks. However, when symptoms are significantly impacting functioning, becoming harder to manage, or are increasing in severity then there is increased need for concern. We encourage you to reach out to NAU Counseling Services during business hours to speak with a counselor. Crisis services available 24/7. (928) 523-2261