

Surviving COVID-19

by

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No one welcomes a diagnosis of COVID-19. Coping with a novel and unpredictable illness is a profound challenge. The illness can take many courses, some involving acute care, ongoing ICU needs, and a risk of fatality. The majority of COVID-19 patients will at very least need to self-quarantine, which creates isolation from family and friends at a particularly vulnerable and worrisome time. These tips can help with the mental health challenges of the disease:

Chronic anxiety and worry

- Many patients experience deeply catastrophic thinking and worries. They justifiably wonder if they will be sick indefinitely, whether they will survive, and in what condition.
- Avoid internet self-diagnosis and most media, which can intensify anxiety
- Recognize that family members love you and want to care for you even if you feel it is too much to expect and a real burden
- Stay in contact with friends and family who can maintain an optimistic perspective, even in the face of all that is unknown. Positive thinking is very powerful, and reassurance and encouragement are necessary.
- Learn and practice mindfulness strategies that will calm your thinking and help you relax.
- Prioritize yourself, your medical care, and your rest while you are ill. Your recovery is really the only priority for you and those who care about you.

Feeling guilty about how your illness affects others, especially family

- Families also need to quarantine. You are not guilty of causing this because you are ill. This is a way they can care for you and protect others from infection.
- It also provides time for them to focus on their own health and make sure any symptoms are recognized and treated immediately.
- Some guilt and sadness about the impact on family members is normal. Remember that they love you and only want you to feel better. Loving someone means you are willing to pay these costs if they become ill. That is what love is.

A life-threatening illness is a serious trauma that can change your personality

- It's hard to feel like yourself when you are seriously ill, and frightened
- Withdrawal and isolation can profoundly affect mood and how you feel about yourself.
- You can look forward to a return to your typical personality functioning as you recover, and the process of dealing with this illness may well leave you with enhanced coping skills

COVID-19 diagnoses can come with stigma that can increase shame and withdrawal

- You are not responsible for your infection or your symptoms—it means nothing about you as a person, and it could happen to anyone
- While some racial and ethnic groups have had more risk for COVID, the disease is not caused by being a member of any such group
- Any one of us can contract this illness even if we are vigilant and follow all recommended precautions
- Since we are still learning about the disease, don't blame yourself if you didn't know that what you were doing could put you at risk.

Stay connected with others

- Sharing your story with trusted friends and caregivers can alleviate pain and isolation, and provide needed sympathy and support.
- Connecting with people decreases isolation and supports the human need to be known and seen by others
- It's easier to be open and forward-thinking when actively engaged with others.
- Reach out for professional help if your emotional symptoms intensify—needing professional help because of a traumatic disease does not imply a chronic mental health concern

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