



February 5, 2021

Stress and Coping

General Information about Stress

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.

- How stress affects you can depend on:
 - Your family situation. For example, being a caregiver to children or elderly is more stressful than being alone.
 - Your employment situation. Being unable to work is much more stressful when you are the person responsible for the family income.
 - The situation in the community. Crowded living conditions and lack of access to basic needs make the situation much more stressful.
- Since everyone reacts differently according to their personal situation, you should not compare yourself to others or feel badly if you feel more stressed than others.

Stress during difficult events can include:

- Constantly being fearful and worrying about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Feeling emotionally upset most of the time
- Feeling nervous or shakiness inside
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Strained relationships
- Being short-tempered or angry more easily
- Having thoughts of dying or hurting ones' self
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- Feelings of sadness and depression
- A loss of interest in things you are normally interested in
- Feeling lonely or isolated
- Feeling tired or slowed down
- Unable to do your normal activities due to your feelings of stress
- Reactions of violence against oneself or others in the family or outside the home
- In addition to these items children and youth may also be more irritable or aggressive, have bad dreams, experience physical symptoms of stress (i.e. headaches, stomach aches) or be more attached to their parents/guardians

If you experience one or more of these reactions to the extent that you are hurting yourself or others, you are not able to do your normal activities, or you feel miserable much of the time then



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you need to take action to reduce your stress. You can use this list to check in on yourself and your family and friends each day. You should look for changes that show you or someone you know needs to try the suggestions below and/or find additional support.

Steps for supporting yourself and others around you

The list below includes things that you might not think are related to stress but are very important in reducing it. These items are just suggestions to try out for some people some of the items will work better than others and that is ok. We encourage everyone to try out as many of these as they can when possible. The suggestions are:

1.1 Take care of yourself– This may look a little different for each individual. Some suggestions are:

- Try to maintain your regular meal times and include healthy foods as much as possible.
- Get up and move around inside and outside your house as much as you can and as much as the regulations in your community allow you.
- Give yourself time to get plenty of sleep (e.g., 8 hours).
- Avoid or limit tobacco, chewing betel, drinking alcohol, and using drugs. Do not increase your use of these or any other substances in order to cope.
- Follow your regular routine to bathe and take care of your personal hygiene

1.2 Connect with others– If regulations in your community require you to keep your physical distance from others outside the home this doesn't mean avoiding talking to them. Not talking to other people will add to your feelings of stress and isolation.

- Some ways include: Social media, telephone or meeting outside houses separated by at least 1 meter (3 feet) but 2 meters (6 feet) is recommended.
- Try to talk with someone at least 3 times a day, every day.
- It's important to talk about your concerns and how you are feeling.

1.3 Try to calm yourself when stress starts to increase–

- Try taking in deep breaths – in through the nose and out through the mouth very slowly. Take at least 5 deep, long, slow breaths.
- Pray or meditate. There are many ways to do this. One may be sitting quietly for 10 minutes to pray or meditate.
- Tell yourself more positive thoughts such as “I am not alone in this” or “I can get through this.” Say a positive thought to yourself 5 times in the morning, afternoon and evening.

1.4 Stay informed but limit media time –

- Check the news from a trusted source.



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- Try to take a break after 10 minutes.
- Avoid social media as your only source of information. Be aware that there are often false rumors during a crisis that are spread on social media.
- Recommended information sources include:
 - Voice of America (<https://www.voanews.com/>)
 - Radio Free Asia (<https://www.rfa.org/burmese/>)

1.5 Do things that bring you joy– These vary for each person.

- Some suggestions include: reading, spending time with children, gardening, walking, listening to music, singing, playing music, meditation, prayer, etc.
- Do the activity for at least 10 minutes – at least twice a day.

1.6 Seek help when needed– If you are having strong feelings of stress despite these suggestions, and/or are thinking about hurting yourself or others, please reach out!

- Check listings for counselors available in your area who can talk to you by phone