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Wellness Matters

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Good Health

Managing Pandemic Uncertainty

Even as we enter a new phase of the pandemic, uncertainty is a familiar foe. As new variants loom and guidelines change, it can be hard to cope. There are healthy ways for you to manage any uncertainty or stress.

Impact on Decision-Making

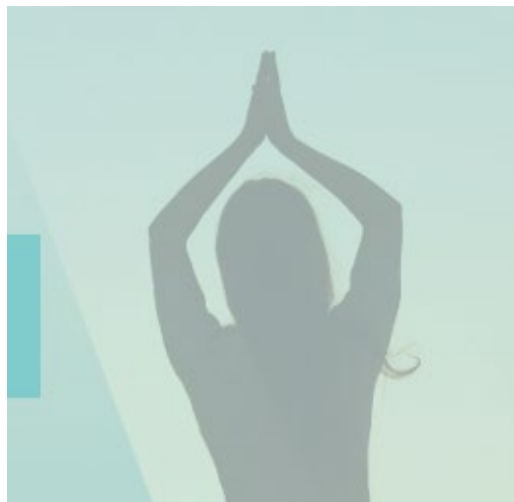
Since the pandemic has imposed the need for constant risk assessment, daily tasks and decision-making are more difficult for many.

According to an American Psychological Association [survey](#), roughly one-third of adults (32%) said sometimes they're so stressed about the pandemic that they struggle to make basic decisions, such as what to wear or eat, and major life decisions. Millennials particularly struggle with this compared with other age groups. Furthermore, 63% of adults said uncertainty causes stress, and 49% said the pandemic has made planning for their future feel impossible.

Coping with Uncertainty

Everyone copes with anxiety differently, so it's crucial to be aware of your response and approach. Consider the following strategies for coping with pandemic-fueled uncertainty:

- Focus on what you can control. Focusing on the things you can't



control, like the course of the pandemic and the actions of others, will only fuel frustration and stress. Instead, focus on things you have control over, such as wearing a mask and choosing environments or social situations you are comfortable with.

- Find a routine. As the pandemic seems unpredictable, developing a routine can help you stay productive and active. Your rituals or routines can help you feel in control. For example, wake up and go to sleep at the same time every day, eat meals at a regular time, and exercise or move daily.
- Take a time out. If you're feeling overwhelmed, focus your energy on something that brings you joy. Taking some "me time" can be a reset and helps minimize your anxiety and stress.
- Make plans but remain flexible. Having something to look forward to is good for your mood, but your plans may require a day-by-day approach to ensure safety.
- Lean on your network. It's well-known that loneliness can take a toll on your mental health, so try to regularly connect with your family, friends, and community.

Healthier Phone Use

The pandemic has accelerated existing mobile habits, but it's essential to understand the difference between necessary and excessive usage. Smartphones have become a necessity for communication, entertainment, and convenience—but it can be a slippery slope if you use your smartphone for most daily tasks or fun. Consider these warning signs that smartphone use is becoming unhealthy:

- Anger or irritation if phone use is interrupted
- Dangerous behavior (i.e., using a smartphone while driving)
- Impaired sleep
- Isolation from loved ones
- Poor work performance

The Impact of Excessive Screen Time

Smartphones have made our lives easier but they can also impact our physical and mental well-being. Excessive smartphone use has been reported to change brain activity, reaction times, and sleep patterns. You may become less concentrated and productive and can often forget tasks and goals. Research shows that excessive phone use can also increase stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness.

Tips for Cutting Back

The first step to cutting back on smartphone use is determining how much time you're spending on your phone. Many phones have digital well-being features that break down how much time you're using for calls, texts, emails, social media, and more. For a healthier relationship with your phone, try the following:

- Set boundaries to outline when you are available
- Turn off notifications to avoid constant interruptions
- Change your screen to grayscale for less appeal
- Check your phone only at specific times
- Avoid use before bedtime to prepare for sleep
- Use an old-fashioned alarm clock to avoid the temptation to scroll your phone unnecessarily



Healthy & Nutritious

Whole Grain, Healthy Gains

Whole grains provide the nutrients necessary for your overall health and can reduce your risk of many chronic diseases. Make sure you're getting three to five servings of whole grains daily.

Whole Grain Benefits

- Reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes
- Helps with weight management
- Helps prevent neural tube defects, spinal bifida, and anencephaly during fetal development when consumed before and during pregnancy
- Provides an excellent source of dietary fiber, B vitamins, and minerals
- Helps the body release energy from protein, fat, and carbohydrates
- Boosts immune system

How Can You Get Your Fill?

- Eat whole wheat, bran, oat, or multigrain breads, cereals, muffins, bagels, and rolls
- Choose whole grain oatmeal—it provides 4 grams of fiber per serving
- Replace all-purpose flour with whole-wheat flour