

COPING WITH STRESS: Advice for hospital staff during the COVID pandemic

You are doing really important and difficult work. Over the coming days and weeks you will probably find that there are times when you feel anxious, stressed, scared, sad, overwhelmed, angry, guilty, helpless or even numb. These are all normal responses to an extremely challenging situation.

You may experience different emotions at different stages of the pandemic. For example, early on, you might feel anxious thinking about what could happen or that you are in a heightened state of “readiness”. At the peak phases you may experience surges of adrenaline. Over time you may feel more like you are “running on empty”.

There may be times when you feel guilty about difficult decisions that you have to make. You may not feel any of these things. There may be times when you feel you are coping well and times you feel that you are coping less well. Everyone is different, and everyone will experience different emotions at different times.

There are things that you can do to help you take care of yourself. Give yourself permission to take regular breaks during your shifts. It is important to try to **eat, drink and sleep properly**. Try to think about and use strategies that have helped you in the past to cope with stressful situations. Make sure that you try to **take some time out between shifts**, slow down and bring levels of arousal back to normal. It is being responsible, not selfish, to look after yourself.

Stay in touch with your friends and family – even if you can’t see them in person, you can have video and phone calls. **Engage in physical activity. Maintain a routine** as much as you can. Plan regular activities that help you feel good. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies like smoking, alcohol or other drugs. Try to limit the time you spend watching, reading or listening to the news. Spend time deliberately engaging with tasks that take your mind away from the current crisis.

If you feel overwhelmed, know that **there are ways to get support. Talk to your colleagues, your manager, or someone else that you trust about how you are feeling**. You are not alone in this situation – your colleagues are likely to be experiencing similar things to you, and you can support each other. Be compassionate to yourself and others. It is OK to say you are not OK.

Focus on what is in your control. Pay attention to things that are going well when you can. Share and celebrate the successes or small wins. Remember this is a marathon, not a sprint. Even though this is a marathon, it will not last forever and the epidemic will end.