



Momentum

Improving your mental wellness

Don't neglect your mental health

In challenging times, it's particularly important to look after your own mental wellness. This may require an active effort on your part to utilize practices that contribute to good mental health.

- Strive to maintain a positive outlook. Despite tough times, look for the positive in all situations. Limit your exposure to toxic stimuli and negative people.
- Have compassion for yourself. Life is challenging, and it's easy to make mistakes now and then. Forgive yourself and acknowledge that you're doing your best at any given moment.
- Challenge negative thoughts. We're often our own worst critics. Remember that self-critical thoughts are not facts. Actively replace them.
- Accept help. It's never wrong to seek an expert perspective from a professional. The right treatment can positively impact your quality of life.

Employee Assistance Program
1-800-523-5668 (TTY 711)
MagellanAscend.com

Contact your program

24/7/365

for confidential, no-cost help
for you and your household
members.

Live Webinar—Please join us
online Wednesday, February 10 for
*Mental Skills Bootcamp: Performing
at Your Best*. Register [here](#).

Tips for boosting mental wellness

Reduce your mind clutter. Practice mindfulness by repeatedly bringing yourself back to the present moment throughout the day—not functioning on “autopilot.” This can reduce stress, anxiety, depression and chronic pain.

Hit your health markers. Getting at least 30 minutes of exercise most days will boost your mental health. Plus, aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night.

Avoid isolation. It can be challenging these days, but stay in regular touch with friends and family. If it helps, join a club of like-minded people or try a new hobby.

Mind Your Mental Health

February includes National School Counseling Week

Observed in the first week of February, National School Counseling Week aims to focus public attention on the unique contribution of school counselors within U.S. school systems. The observance acknowledges counselors for partnering with parents in addressing the challenges of raising children in today's world.

1. **Talk with your child.** If you think your child might be suffering the effects of stress, anxiety or depression, make time to talk with them. Ask questions about how they're feeling. Express your love and support.
2. **Nurture their well-being.** Encourage your child to get regular exercise, spend time with supportive friends, eat healthy foods and get enough sleep.
3. **Seek help if needed.** It's normal for a child to be moody or sad occasionally. However, if these feelings last for weeks or months, depression may be the cause. Talk to your child's pediatrician or a counselor.

Visit www.MagellanHealthcare.com/About/MYMH or call your program for confidential mental health resources.

Working on Wellness

Prioritizing a healthy heart

- American Heart Month, observed in February, reminds us to make heart-healthy choices including not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling blood sugar and cholesterol, treating high blood pressure and getting regular exercise.
- A USDA-endorsed heart-healthy eating plan recommends eating lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat or non-fat dairy products. Also, strive to limit or avoid saturated fats, trans fats and added sugars.

Showing Support

Helping those with eating disorders

- Whether they are unaware there's a problem, ashamed to reach out, or ambivalent about giving up their unhealthy eating behaviors, many who suffer with eating disorders find it difficult to seek help.
- People in recovery from eating disorders (such as anorexia, bulimia or binge eating) often say that family and friends helping them get screened, evaluated and treated was crucial to their getting well.



Managing Work-Life Balance

Maintaining winter wellness

With shorter days and colder weather, finding the motivation to stay healthy can be difficult. The colder weather creates a number of safety risks to us and to those around us, and some of these we may not even be aware of. Recognizing safety risks and patterns of illness or low energy ahead of time is key to preventing them—or at least to dealing with them as they arise.

Visit your member website for information to help you stay healthy, fit and safe this during the winter months and beyond. Find topics such as developing a healthy attitude toward food and exercise, taking advantage of available preventive care services, and sleep health training and more.

How to comfort and support others during the pandemic

Grieving the loss of a family member, friend or colleague is difficult. The pandemic has made it even harder for many people to cope. Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 or other illnesses may face additional grief and sadness. Infection control restrictions have left them unable to visit or say goodbye. Moreover, traditional wakes and funeral services have been modified or eliminated due to social distancing and limits on the size of gatherings, changing the way people can comfort and support each other.

Many people have experienced multiple losses. For example, the loss of a loved one at the same time as unemployment and social isolation. The resulting grief may be prolonged and complicated with delays in the ability to heal and move forward.

Common grief reactions

Pain associated with grief is a normal response to loss and can be felt on emotional, physical and spiritual levels. Common reactions to grief are:

- Initial feelings of shock, denial and disbelief, which can be heightened when the death is sudden and unexpected
- Feelings of worry, fear, frustration, anger or guilt
- Physical reactions such as headaches, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, pain and other stress-related symptoms
- Spiritual expressions of grief, such as questioning the meaning and purpose of life, pain and suffering

There is no specific time after which grief or mourning will end. Depending on the relationship with the individual and the circumstances of the loss, grief can last for weeks to years. Grief can ebb and flow at unexpected times, triggered by memories of the deceased person, holidays and anniversaries of loss.

Coping with loss

It is important to find ways to express grief.

- Connect with other people, such as friends, relatives, support groups and faith-based organizations if applicable, even if the contact must be virtual or by phone. Sharing your feelings with people who understand what you are going through is comforting and eases loneliness.
- Participate in an activity, such as planting a tree or creating a memory book, to honor the person you lost. Ask family and friends to contribute their memories and stories.
- Take good care of yourself. Maintain a balanced diet, moderate exercise and adequate sleep. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, such as a massage or a walk.
- Avoid the use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to escape emotional pain.
- Don't be afraid to ask others for help. Allow other people to assume some of your responsibilities when you are feeling overwhelmed.

When time has passed, if you are still having difficulty functioning, seek support through grief counseling, your program, support groups or hotlines.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

7 Tips to strengthen your mental health during the pandemic

There is no question that the pandemic has affected the mental health of Americans of all ages. We have experienced months of social isolation, job changes and unemployment, school closures and other disruptions. This has led to a surge in the number of people reporting high levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Given the uncertainty of when life will return to normal, finding ways to manage negative emotions and strengthen your mental health is important.

Building and exercising resilience skills can help protect your mental and emotional health. Try these tips:

- **Stay in touch with positive and supportive people, even if you can't see them in person.** Strong social connections can reduce stress and help you feel happier and more energetic. If you haven't already, learn to use video platforms like FaceTime and Zoom to stay in touch with friends and family.
- **Practice ways to manage everyday stress.** For some people, a daily walk eases the pressure of the day. Try meditation, reading, yoga, working on a hobby, listening to music or any other activity that you enjoy. Practice finding something you can be grateful for every day. You will feel more positive and recharged.
- **Find what motivates you.** Research shows that people who feel they have a purpose in life tend to be happier and live longer. For some, being creative, helping other people or devoting their time and energy to a cause can be the best motivators.
- **Make self-care a priority.** Physical and mental health are closely intertwined. In difficult times, it is important to get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet and exercise. Avoid using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope with negative emotions; they can make sadness, depression and anxiety worse.

- **Limit the amount of time you spend on social media and the news.** If you are constantly frustrated and upset over what you see in the news or on social media, limit or take a break from both.
- **Maintain your sense of humor and practice reframing negative thoughts.** If negative thoughts and images are invading your mind, draw your attention to your surroundings. Being present in the moment, or mindful, is one way to break a pattern of negative thinking. Humor is another way to defuse negative emotions.
- **Give others the benefit of the doubt.** Everyone is affected by the pandemic in one way or another, and others' emotions may not be obvious. Be kind in any interaction with others.

If you find that your mental health symptoms are negatively impacting your quality of life, consider talking to a professional.

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How to cope with stress caused by current events

Anxiety is a normal response to a constant barrage of bad news. Headlines and notifications related to recent events are taking their toll on mental health in what some call “headline stress disorder.”

While this is not a medical diagnosis, the continued anxiety or stress from headlines may cause things like heart palpitations and chest tightness or insomnia. Further progression may lead to physical and mental conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, endocrine disorders or hypertension.¹ The combination of civil unrest, political instability and COVID-19, and the resulting economic uncertainty, has led to an increase in stress and anxiety in society. Both adults and children may struggle to process their feelings and maintain a sense of normalcy.

Here are some tips to help you understand and manage your fears, how to help children deal with traumatic events and how to know when you or someone close might need help.

Understanding the emotional and physical reactions to traumatic events

Emotional reactions

When the initial shock of a traumatic event subsides, normal emotional responses in the hours and days that follow may come in waves and at unpredictable times. These responses include:

- Fear and anxiety
- Sadness and depression
- Guilt, shame or despair
- Anger and irritability
- Emotional numbness
- Feelings of separation from others

Physical reactions

Physical reactions are the result of stress hormones flooding the nervous system. Common physical symptoms include:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Fatigue
- Headache, abdominal pain or other physical pain
- Racing heart
- Dizziness or fainting
- Change of appetite

How to help yourself

- Take care of yourself first. Eat healthy foods, get enough rest and exercise regularly. Physical activity can reduce anxiety and promote well-being.
- Talk to people you trust about your concerns. A supportive network is important for emotional health.
- Take time for hobbies and fun activities or find interesting volunteer activities. This can be a healthy distraction from everyday stress.
- Limit your exposure to disruptive TV, radio and social media coverage.
- Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation.

How to help children cope with traumatic events

- Be aware of your own reactions to the event and manage your own stress. Stay calm and offer hugs and reassurance to restore your child's sense of safety and security.
- Share information about the event and answer your child's questions honestly. Listen to your child's fears and let them know that it is okay to share their feelings at any time.
- Restrict or prevent contact with disturbing news and social media coverage of the event. Children who see graphic images or hear disturbing news can be re-traumatized.
- Maintain as many stable routines as possible, including regular meals, bedtimes and exercise.
- Engage in fun activities to help the children relax and get the feeling that life is back to normal.
- Watch for signs of trauma, even after weeks have passed. Children, like adults, cope with trauma in different ways, and may show signs of sadness, anxiety or disruptive behavior weeks or months after the event.

Know when to get help

- Common signs that you or your child may need professional help can include: excessive worrying or fear, extreme mood swings, avoidance of friends, difficulty understanding or relating to other people, changes in eating and sleeping habits and inability to engage in daily activities or deal with daily problems and stress.
- If you are suffering from stress reactions that affect your ability to lead a normal life for six weeks or more, you may need help from a mental health professional. While everyone is different and heals at their own pace, some people develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after a traumatic event.
- Signs of PTSD include: disturbing memories, nightmares or flashbacks, suicidal thoughts or feelings, disconnection from others and trouble functioning at home and work. It is important to seek help if you think you might have symptoms of PTSD.

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¹<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7104635/>