

STRATEGIES FOR COPING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

Living in a time of uncertainty and change is stressful, especially when we feel powerless. You may not have control over the circumstances, but you can make the choice to respond constructively rather than simply reacting to what is happening. Taking responsibility for your well-being and finding effective coping strategies can help you better navigate the stress of uncertainty.

Mental coping strategies

- › **Get facts from reliable sources.** Relying on biased or inaccurate sources can increase stress.
- › **Take a problem-solving approach.** How am I being impacted? How can I improve those outcomes? Taking a fact-based look at the situation gives you a greater sense of control.
- › **Talk it out.** Brainstorm problem-solving ideas with others to get their input and ideas.
- › **Give your thoughts a break** from focusing on the “what-ifs” that cause anxiety. Concentrate on the here and now. Focus on your loved ones, activities you enjoy, and practical tasks.
- › **Structure your time.** Large blocks of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most. This can make your interpretation of what’s happening more upsetting than it actually is. Routines and a normal schedule can help you feel more balanced.
- › **Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to get done in the next hour? The next day? The next week? Focus on short-term accomplishments to help you feel more in control.
- › **Remember your resilience**
We base much of our lives on the belief that life is reasonably predictable and controllable. We form expectations for the future based on that. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, it shakes our world. We can lose our balance. But previous crises and challenges in life remind us that, eventually, balance returns. Remember the strength that is within you that has helped you rebound after difficulties.
- › **Look at the experiences of others.** The thoughts and perspectives of others who have experienced challenges can put your own in context. You may discover approaches or attitudes that can help you manage your feelings.
- › **Remind yourself of your abilities.** Self-statements such as “I have always figured out some way to land on my feet” get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship – you’re not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.

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Emotional coping strategies

- › **Reach out to people who care and give voice** to your feelings and fears. Talk out your thoughts and worries with loved ones.
- › **Write out your feelings.** Unmet expectations and uncertainty can trigger strong feelings. You may struggle with anger, grief, and anxiety. Putting these feelings into words can help you understand and manage them better.
- › **Recognize anger as a secondary emotion.** Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion, such as fear, hurt, or powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling anger, search for the deeper emotion, and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.
- › **Be cautious not to take out your anger on others.** It can push them away and make it harder to find solutions that help you move forward in a positive way. If possible, talk about what you're feeling and why. Ask for their understanding.
- › **Look for healthy, safe emotional outlets.** Bottling up emotions can make us feel tense and strained. They can build and ultimately come out in ways that can be upsetting. What helps you release emotion – running, music, kick-boxing, painting, talking? Try to figure out what works and turn to it when emotions build.

Physical coping strategies

- › **Getting enough sleep to feel rested** is a key ingredient of self-care. It impacts both mood and energy level. Establish a routine and get to bed at a reasonable hour.
- › **Physical activity** is a good way to reduce feelings of stress and tension – in your body and in your thoughts. Exercise can also help you sleep better, if it's done at least several hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
- › **Try to eat well-balanced meals** at regular times of the day.
- › **Nurture yourself by doing something calming and relaxing.** Deep breathing, meditation and progressive relaxation can help you de-stress. But simply doing activities you enjoy can also help release tension.
- › **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope, unless your doctor gives you a needed prescription.



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