

Covid 19... How to Cope During These Uncharted Times

I would have never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be writing about an event of such magnitude. It is common for everyone to experience increased levels of distress and anxiety, particularly as a result of social isolation. I personally found myself vulnerable and knew that there would be many changes in my life and wondered how I would be able to adjust knowing very well that I was a creature of habit and hated change. Information overload, rumors and misinformation made me feel that my life was out of control and made me unsure of what to do.

I began to read everything I could get my hand on pertaining to Covid 19 on how to manage and control my mental wellbeing. The research clearly states that these uncharted waters leave a lot of questions unanswered.

I read that the self-care strategies were good for one's mental health and could help in managing the uncharted and unknown life that all mental health professionals and patients face. Many written articles by healthcare professionals repeatedly emphasized maintaining good physical health, for it was known that being healthy physically would increase the chances in fighting off the virus. Getting enough sleep was another recommendation, along with regular physical exercise, which could help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Keeping socially distant from others is obviously something that needs to be a must. Eating healthy was also recommended, like avoiding loading up on comfort food and caffeine, as it can aggravate stress and anxiety. An emphasis on not smoking was one of the major recommendations. Covid 19 affects the lungs, and your risk increases substantially if you are a smoker. Consuming alcohol to deal with your anxiety and depression can make matters worse and reduce your coping skills. Personally, watching TV, with all the negativity, was extremely overwhelming for me, so I limited myself from watching it, which I feel all of us should do. I have a hobby that I do every day. I play my bugle, and my instrument, the washboard. It relaxes me and gets my mind off any anxiety I may have that day. Being spiritual is an everyday goal of mine. If you draw strength from a belief system, it can bring you comfort during difficult times. If you need to stay home and distance yourself from others, avoid social isolation. Find time each day to make virtual connections by email, text, phone, or facetime. Support a family or friend, especially if he or she has a mental illness and needs to be isolated for safety reasons or gets sick and needs to be quarantined at home or in a hospital. Come up with ways to stay in contact. Not having a mental illness can be a lot more manageable than someone with mental illness in dealing with Covid. I know firsthand. Hoping that mental health problems go away on their own can lead to worsening symptoms. In February of this year, I missed taking my meds for a few days. Was it on purpose, or did I just forget? I recall being very agitated and depressed. I do not think it was solely because I missed taking my meds. I think it was a combination of me being depressed and not caring about my mental well-being at the time. I called my therapist and received some coping skills she recommended. It was extremely helpful. If you need help, reach out and get it. You can expect your current strong feelings to fade when the pandemic is over, but your stress and your mental illness will not disappear from your life. Continue these self-care practices to take care of your mental health and increase your ability to cope with life's ongoing challenges.

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