



Combatting the Winter Blues Alongside the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This year, the COVID-19 pandemic's first wave during Spring and Summer, which resulted in two distinct surges, has caused an increase in mental and behavioral health issues such as depression and anxiety. Typically, the fall and winter months see an increase in mental and behavioral health issues due to decreased daylight, colder temperatures, and for some, holiday-related stress and anxiety. As we enter the fall and winter seasons with COVID-19 cases increasing and expectation of a much worse second wave, experts are concerned about another major surge in mental and behavioral health issues. Your holiday plans may look different during the COVID-19 pandemic. The high level of stress caused by the pandemic, especially during the holidays, can make people more susceptible to depression and anxiety. Additionally, the pandemic has disrupted education, relationships, employment and finances; families who used to take an annual vacation have not been able to do so. This has caused prolonged stress that can adversely affect the mind and body.

[Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\)](#) is a type of depression related to changes in season, and as we welcome November is it important to be aware of the effects of SAD as it could be compounded by the mental and behavioral health impact of the pandemic. The symptoms can be distressing and overwhelming and can interfere with daily functioning. However, it can be treated.

Many individuals are also experiencing "COVID-19 fatigue" and are tired of feeling cooped up in their homes and practicing caution in social situations. While this pandemic has consumed 2020, it is important to continue to practice safety measures and fight through the fatigue, throwing caution to the wind will only put you and your loved ones at greater risk.

Throughout this crisis it is important that individuals focus on their mental health as well as their physical health. By utilizing positive coping mechanisms, individuals can help mitigate psychological distress as they promote safety for themselves, their loved ones, and their community.



Take Care of Yourself

Surround yourself with positive-energy and prioritize taking care of yourself by setting up a healthy daily routine. Practice positive self-care by doing activities that make you feel good whether it be treating yourself to a bubble bath or picking up a good book. Eating healthy and getting plenty of sleep are also activities that can improve mental health. Engage in a hobby like painting, gardening, playing games, doing puzzles, and other tasks which engage your brain. These forms of self-care could help you navigate the winter blues and the pandemics in a healthy, positive way. Understand that you are not alone so share your feelings with family and/or friends and make sure you seek professional help if needed.



Stay Connected to Friends and Loved Ones

Public health officials are still urging Americans to be physically distant, but that does not mean you have to lose connections with friends and family. Stay connected through phone and/or video calls, letter and cards, email, and text messaging. Technology and social media allow everyone to quickly connect and stay connected from the comfort and safety of their homes. Schedule a weekly group video chat with friends, or play [online games](#) together. Staying connected helps ease feelings of loneliness and is a reminder that we are all in this together.



Mix Up Your At-Home Routine

Many offices and workplaces have yet to reopen and conducting business remotely can contribute to feelings of isolation and fatigue. Now is a perfect time to mix up your work from home routine to help yourself refresh and have a strong finish to 2020. If you like to go on a walk after work, try waking up early and going on a walk before work, or give yourself an extra 20 minutes in the morning to read your favorite book or listen to your favorite podcast. Decorate your home office for the holidays to make the space more festive. If you do not have a daily routine, create one that incorporates all your favorite activities and gives you something to look forward to during the workday. If you are not currently working, create goals for yourself such as completing [home improvement or craft projects](#). Goals and projects can help you with a sense of accomplishment and serve as motivation during self-quarantining.



Practice Mindfulness

[Mindfulness](#) is the therapeutic practice of clearing the mind and focusing your awareness on the present moment to ease mental tension. This is often attained through focused breathing exercises and meditation. [YouTube](#) has videos on meditating at home that can help clear the mind and ease anxiety. Mindfulness and meditation can provide relief from anxiety and stress caused by social distancing. Just 15 minutes of meditation helps improve mental health.



Get Active

Physical activity significantly improves mental health and wellbeing. Something as simple as taking a walk or a quick [at-home workout](#) can reduce anxiety and depression and improve self-esteem. To help individuals stay active some gyms are offering [online classes](#) that participants can follow along with at home. It's never too late to tackle that new year's resolution and work on getting your mind and body in shape (if your doctor says it's safe to do so).



Limiting Exposure to the News

The constant media coverage of COVID-19 can cause severe anxiety and lead to increased feelings of fear and uncertainty. Limit your exposure to the news by allotting only 30 minutes of news in the morning and evening. Allow yourself enough time that you stay current on the news and local happenings of the day but are not overwhelmed with content. If you find that exposure to the news is negatively impacting your mental health, limit your time on social media. To stay up-to-date on the virus, check the [CDC's website](#) for new guidance.

Below are additional resources for improving mental health during this winter's COVID-19 pandemic:

- CDC [guidance](#) coping with stress and anxiety
- [Disaster Distress Helpline](#)
- Guidance from the [American Psychological Association](#)
- Information from the [National Alliance on Mental Health](#)

INSIGHTS BY

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