

Managing depression during the pandemic

What do we mean by depression?

Depression doesn't mean just feeling sad. Nowadays depression is often misused to describe normal, temporary feelings of sadness, grief or disappointment. Depression is an extremely low mood that lasts at least 2 weeks in which someone feels extremely sad and hopeless, with lots of negative or self-critical thoughts. Their energy levels are reduced and their sleep, appetite, concentration and memory may all be affected. They might feel irritable, and often, particularly men with depression might appear to be angry, rather than low.

The current situation of isolation, anxiety, economic uncertainty, and the daily onslaught of bad news generated by the coronavirus pandemic is taking an important toll on our mood. These stressors that many are experiencing can trigger depression for the first time or intensify symptoms if already diagnosed.

How COVID-19 affects depression

Isolation and loneliness fuels depression. Human beings are social creatures. Being away from the love, support, and close contact of family and friends can trigger depression or make existing symptoms worse. Maintaining social distance and staying at home can leave you feeling isolated and lonely, having to face your problems alone.



A strained or troubled relationship makes things worse. While strong and supportive relationships are crucial for your mental wellbeing, being forced to spend months quarantined during a troubled, unhappy, or abusive relationship are often even more damaging to your mood than being alone.

Anxiety can lead to depression. It is obvious to worry about the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19. When your worries are out of control, they can cause panic and anxiety.

Stress levels are rising. As a result of this pandemic, you may be experiencing several major stressors like the death of a loved one, loss of a job, being diagnosed with a serious illness, or financial difficulties, all at once, making you more likely to feel depressed.

Turning to unhealthy ways of coping. These same stressors can lead to unhealthy ways of coping, such as drinking too much, smoking a lot, abusing drugs, or overeating junk food in an attempt to elevate mood and deal with stress. While these methods may work in the short term, they make depression symptoms much worse in the long run.



Managing the symptoms of depression

- 1. Limit your consumption of news-** While the news can help keep you informed, too much consumption of news or social media posts about COVID can affect your mental health. It might help to schedule “news slots” into your routine.
- 2. Exercise-** Being more active or taking exercise can really help to tackle the low energy and tiredness of depression, as well as boost self-esteem and give you a sense of accomplishment.
- 3. Do things that are important to you-** Plan daily activities that are meaningful to you. These could be things you need to do or things that give you pleasure. Do them even if you don't feel like it since the more you re-engage with things that are important to you, the more the feelings of pleasure and satisfaction will come back.

- 4. Find new ways to engage with others-** You might be feeling lonely or isolated and activities like attending online classes or contacting your friends to share your feelings or playing games with family members can help you re-engage with others.
- 5. Express gratitude** – When you are feeling low you need to find things to be grateful for. These can be your friends, family, pets, the work you do, or even just the beauty of nature.
- 6. Practice Relaxation:** Taking some time to relax and soothe the body and the mind. This can be done by practising deep breathing, some simple stretches, listening to music, or following a relaxation exercise or guided meditation online
- 7. Connect virtually with providers-** Consider using teletherapy to keep routine check-ins and receive therapy and treatment from a mental health professional or you can connect to the Sangath support group (listening circle).

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