



More stressed than ever since Covid-19 started? You're not alone...

New research shows that adults are feeling higher levels of stress now, than they did a year ago, when Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic. Experts believe that the majority of people are experiencing a "collective trauma" at this point - but believe that focusing on basic self-care strategies can combat the negative effects of prolonged stress.

Stress: what it looks like

Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when you meet a deadline. During a worldwide pandemic, however, (prolonged) stress manifests in many different ways:

- ⊗ Feelings of anger, sadness, worry, numbness or frustration
- ⊗ Changes in appetite, energy, desires and interests
- ⊗ Physical reactions such as headaches and stomach problems
- ⊗ Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- ⊗ Worsening of chronic health problems
- ⊗ Worsening of mental health conditions
- ⊗ Emotional eating and increased use of substances (alcohol, tobacco)

One survey that was conducted in the US for four days in January 2021 questioned just over 2 000 people, who are 18 years and older. Although the stress levels were "average" across the group, 84% of adults said they experienced at least one emotion tied to prolonged stress in the prior two weeks, with adults mostly feeling anxiety (47%), sadness (44%) and anger (39%). Our mental, emotional and physical health has all been affected, as we weren't built to maintain this level of stress, hypervigilance and hyperarousal for this length of time.

Mental health

Continued fear and worry about things that are out of your control (your health, the health of your loved ones, potentially losing your job or your financial situation) would take its toll on anyone. Even if you've had a relatively okay year, the stress of "simply" trying to simultaneously homeschool your kids, manage work pressure and keep a household going (for example), all has an effect. Although a vaccine rollout is happening, if stress gets in the way of your everyday activities, or if you are struggling to cope, call your GP immediately.

Emotional health

Although public health actions, such as social distancing are necessary to reduce the spread of Covid-19, they can make us feel isolated and lonely and increase stress and anxiety. One year in, this might be particularly true, if you have been diligent and stayed at home, hardly seeing anyone and only really going out to get groceries and essentials. Seeing other people in large groups at so called "super spreader" events, especially over holidays, might make you feel anger and rage. This is when chatting to your GP or psychologist can be a big help.

Physical health

You might think that you have coped pretty well over the last 12 months, but a low or depressed mood or simply feeling "a bit sad" for a prolonged period of time can affect people's resilience. Over time, that sort of chronic, low-level stress can affect people's health and immune system - and worsen chronic (and stress-related) illnesses. It activates your fight or flight response; from there your heart rate or blood pressure might go up, without you even realising, which is why it's important to get a handle on your stress.

Self-care strategies to help you and your family to cope with stress:

Take a break from the news.

This also includes social media, as constantly hearing about the pandemic can be upsetting. Children, in particular, may misinterpret what they hear and might be overly worried about something they don't understand. Limit your news intake to a few times a day and turn off notifications to news services on your phone, if needed.

Take care of your body.

Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep. Continue with routine preventative measures (such as vaccinations, cancer screenings and taking your vitamins and supplements), as recommended by your GP.

Take time to unwind.

Do activities you enjoy (or used to enjoy). Activities such as reading, art, chess - and even adult colouring books, crosswords and Sudoku - help you to relax, as you are "forced" to focus on one task. Try some mindfulness activities too, such as yoga or meditation (just 5 minutes a day), which will really help to de-stress.

Make time for family, friends and faith.

Spend time with your kids doing meaningful activities together, such as reading, exercising, doing board games or cooking. Even if you're not seeing people in person, make time to connect with people digitally. An online church service, a call with a loved one, or a weekly Zoom dinner with friends might make all the difference to your stress levels, as you have something to look forward to.

"As prolonged stress can affect your general mood and wellbeing - but also your immune system - it's important to really prioritise time for self-care for you and your family. If it means actually "booking in time" in your diary, like you do all your other meetings, then do it. That way, there are no excuses or ways to get out of it."

David van der Knaap, CEO OracleMed Health



For any further information please contact
David van der Knaap CEO, OracleMed Health (Pty) Ltd.
Tel: +27 82 892 9555 or e-mail: david@oraclemed.com