

Reactions to Chronic Stress



What You Should Know

Disasters often create stress that lasts for weeks and months. Reactions to this stress can include:

- Frustration and worry
- Tension and irritability
- Feelings of sadness and demoralization
- Feeling overwhelmed by major life changes

What Can Help

- **Increase self-care and sleep hygiene.** Make sure to take care of your physical health. Work toward eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, drinking plenty of water, and trying to get enough sleep. Start by changing your habits in one area, then work on another, and so on.
- **Practice relaxation exercises.** Add regular short “mental relaxation” breaks and breathing exercises to your daily life. Find time each day to use these skills.
- **Make use of periods of reduced stress.** Take advantage of times when you have less stress or a lighter workload to reintroduce positive or meaningful activities into your life, including couple/family activities, time with friends, exercise, or hobbies.
- **Organize your thoughts and feelings.** You can write in a journal or write a letter to a family member or friend to help you clarify your thoughts and feelings. You don’t have to mail your letter. You might keep it for a while until you decide what to do with it, tear it up, or add it to a journal to remember how you were thinking and feeling during this very difficult time.
- **Gain a broad perspective.** If you are feeling bad about yourself or your life, make a list of your personal strengths and successes, such as being a hardworking and a loving parent, having helped a friend in need, or having gone back to school to learn new skills. Use this list to find positive, helpful “self-statements” to replace any negative self-feelings.
- **Help others.** Take a break from your own problems. Helping other people in need or working in your community can take your mind off your own problems, put them in perspective, and make you feel better about yourself.