

ASK THE EXPERT



Improve your emotional wellbeing during COVID-19

Our minds and bodies are powerful allies. How we feel can affect our thinking, which in turn can affect how we feel physically. Taking care of our emotional health is just as important as our physical wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought stress, anxiety and depression to the forefront for so many of us. We checked in with Dr. Sudha Bakshi to have an open discussion about emotional wellbeing, tips she has on how to cope and why she is optimistic about the future.

Q. Most people deal with stress on occasion, but the COVID-19 pandemic has brought several new challenges. How is pandemic-related stress different and how is it impacting us?

- ✔ **The stress of the pandemic is primarily due to people having to deal with a lot of rapid change.** In the beginning, we didn't know how long we would have to maintain these changes and, along the way, more occurred. But now, we're approaching the one year "anniversary," which is hard to believe. Reflecting on and taking the time to understand these experiences will help us move forward.

Sudha Bakshi, M.D.

Dr. Bakshi is a Behavioral Health Medical Director at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield. She is board certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. She completed her internship and residency at Brown University and fellowship at Louisiana State University.

Q. It truly can be a lot to cope with. What are some practical steps a person can take to help manage pandemic stress and anxiety?

- ✔ I find it comforting to know that people worldwide are going through a lot of similar challenges, and we can connect and help one another based on that shared experience.

Here are things that have been particularly helpful to me:

Practice Daily Self-Care



Learn how to recognize the signs that you are feeling down or anxious, and find small things you can do to take care of your mind and body. Practicing mindfulness and deep breathing or a gratitude journal may help.

Check in with Yourself



Recognize when you need to step away from work or other obligations.

Create Joy in Your Day



Learn a new hobby, read the book you've been putting off or connect with friends and family virtually. Our [COVID-19 resource website](#) offers fun and safe winter tips.

Know It's Okay to Get Help



There is more awareness, dialogue and openness to seeking mental health support. Mental health professionals can play a key role. Don't be afraid to get more support if things get too tough to manage on your own.

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Q. What resources would you recommend for those experiencing pandemic fatigue and/or dealing with stress, anxiety or depression?

- ✔ Consider checking in with your doctor or connecting with a mental health counselor through a telemedicine visit. It may be difficult at first, but I encourage anyone struggling to reach out, get assistance and take advantage of the many resources available. For instance, our [24/7 Nurse Line](#) is a helpful resource you can access by dialing 1-800-348-9786 (TTY: 1-800-662-1220). Remember, you are not alone. There are others here to help.

Q. We know that social distancing is crucial in the fight against COVID-19. Do you have any tips on combating loneliness during the pandemic?

- ✔ Winter can make this sense of loneliness especially difficult. [To help combat it, let the people close to you know how you are feeling.](#) Take a socially distanced walk in nature wearing masks or discuss how you might be able to safely visit outdoors. Creativity can go a long way in helping maintain healthy relationships.

Q. How are you personally dealing with the emotional challenges of the pandemic?

- ✔ For me, it has been [trying to achieve a new life balance.](#) I admit this has been difficult as new events continue to arise. I am not able to care for family members when they are ill or grieve together as a family in ways that would usually bring comfort. But I also know this has been a universal experience. It helps to know I am not alone in this.



Q. Post-pandemic, are you optimistic about the future? Do you believe stress levels will eventually decrease?

- ✔ [Yes, I try to stay positive about the future and nurture that hope.](#) I visualize the simple pleasures of being together again with the people I love. I think stress levels will decrease as we are able to be active and engaged without so much worry.



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