

DEPRESSION & COVID-19

COVID-19 has significantly impacted mental health in the United States. A recent U.S. Census Bureau survey found that nearly 42% of those sampled reported symptoms of anxiety or depression during the pandemic.¹ Many have reported symptoms in response to pandemic fears, quarantine isolation, illness recovery and adaptation, caregiver distress, and traumatic stress, as well as grief due to COVID-19-related losses. The challenges and changes to daily living associated with COVID-19 likely will persist for the foreseeable future. Understanding the signs and symptoms of depression, ways of coping, and being aware of available resources can help individuals and communities better manage the pandemic's impact on mental health. **If you have any thoughts of suicide, please contact your health care provider, friends, or family, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text TALK to 74174. Please call 911 or visit the nearest emergency room immediately if you have active thoughts about harming yourself or another person.**

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Tearfulness, sadness, or emptiness
- Sleep difficulties
- Difficulty concentrating
- Slowness in activity
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Lack of motivation
- Low energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness
- Thoughts, plans, or intentions of suicide or recurrent thoughts of death

COPING STRATEGIES

Relaxation – Diaphragmatic, or deep breathing, increases oxygen flow throughout the body and can relieve depressive symptoms. Begin by drawing a deep breath from your nose for 4 seconds to inflate your abdomen. Then, hold your breath for 5 seconds and exhale from your mouth through pursed lips for 6 seconds to deflate the abdomen. You should notice your stomach rising and falling with each inhale and exhale.

Grounding – Grounding tethers us back to the present when we feel overwhelming emotions. To ground, you can identify an object in your environment and describe it using your 5 senses. Another way involves identifying 5 things you see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste, known as the 5-4-3-2-1 technique.

Examining Thoughts – Thoughts can impact how we feel and behave. Unhelpful, inaccurate, or non-compassionate thoughts can maintain depressive symptoms. To begin identifying these, start paying attention to your feelings throughout the day and asking yourself what you just thought. Consider alternate perspectives, whether the thought works for you or against you, and whether you'd say the same thing to someone you love and respect.

COPING STRATEGIES, *continued*

Acceptance & Commitment – Observing feelings and thoughts without judgment can help move us through discomfort and pain. Learn to see challenging thoughts and feelings as fleeting, non-threatening, observable, and passable things. Accept these challenges as opportunities to act according to your values here and now, no matter what has happened in the past.

Health Behaviors – Adhering to an anti-inflammatory diet, attempting to get adequate sleep and exercise, and staying engaged in personally meaningful activities and interpersonal relationships can help prevent and manage depressive symptoms.

Treatment – Seeking appropriate care for your symptoms can increase insight into them and expand your range of coping skills. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), alone or combined with psychotropic medication, is the gold standard of behavioral treatments for depression. Ask your health care provider for more information.

Helpful Apps (by category)

Relaxation

Calm
Breath2Relax
Shine
Breathwrk
Stop, Breathe & Think

Wellness

B Well UAB
Exhale
Happify
Aura
Headspace

Suicide Safety

Be Safe
Staying Safe
Suicide Safety Plan
Better Stop Suicide

RESOURCES

- **UAB Post-COVID Treatment Program** – 205-975-1881
- **UAB Department of Psychiatry** – 205-934-7008 option #1
- **Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – 800-273-8255 or text TALK to 74174
- **American Psychological Association** – [apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral](https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral)

1. Vahratian, A., Blumberg, S.J., Terlizzi, E.P., & Schiller, J.S. (2021). Symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder and use of mental health care among adults during the COVID-19 pandemic — United States, August 2020–February 2021. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 70(13), 490–494. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7013e2>.