



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

10 Tips for Dealing With the Stress of Uncertainty

Most people are creatures of habit. When things go as planned, we feel in control. But when life throws a curveball, it can leave us feeling anxious and stressed. For many Americans life feels particularly uncertain lately, with an unconventional presidential administration, social protests in the news and uncertainty in the aftermath of natural disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires.

Findings from the most recent APA Stress in America Survey (</news/press/releases/stress/index.aspx>) highlight other common ways that uncertainty stresses us out:

- More than a third of Americans cite unexpected expenses as a source of stress related to money.
- Nearly a third of Americans say economic uncertainty is a source of stress when thinking about the economy.
- When it comes to health-related issues, around two-thirds of Americans cite uncertainty about the future as a source of stress. A similar proportion is stressed about possible changes to healthcare policy.

Research shows that people react differently to uncertainty, and that those with a higher intolerance for uncertainty may be less resilient and more prone to low mood, negative or down feelings and anxiety.

No one can avoid the unexpected. But these simple steps can help you better face life's uncertainties.

- **Be kind to yourself.** Some people are better at dealing with uncertainties than others, so don't beat yourself up if your tolerance for unpredictability is lower than a friend's. Remind yourself that it might take time for the stressful situation to resolve, and be patient with yourself in the meantime.
- **Reflect on past successes.** Chances are you've overcome stressful events in the past – and you survived! Give yourself credit. Reflect on what you did during that event that was helpful, and what you might like to do differently this time.
- **Develop new skills.** When life is relatively calm, make a point to try things outside your comfort zone. From standing up to a difficult boss to trying a new sport, taking risks helps you develop confidence and skills that come in handy when life veers off course.
- **Limit exposure to news.** When we're stressed about something, it can be hard to look away. But compulsively checking the news only keeps you wound up. Try to limit your check-ins and avoid the news during vulnerable times of day, such as right before bedtime.
- **Avoid dwelling on things you can't control.** When uncertainty strikes, many people immediately imagine worst-case scenarios. Get out of the habit of ruminating on negative events.
- **Take your own advice.** Ask yourself: If a friend came to me with this worry, what would I tell her? Imagining your situation from the outside can often provide perspective and fresh ideas.
- **Engage in self-care.** Don't let stress derail your healthy routines. Make efforts to eat well, exercise and get enough sleep. Many people find stress release in practices such as yoga and meditation.

- **Seek support from those you trust.** Many people isolate themselves when they're stressed or worried. But social support is important, so reach out to family and friends.
- **Control what you can.** Focus on the things that are within your control, even if it's as simple as weekly meal planning or laying out your clothes the night before a stressful day. Establish routines to give your days and weeks some comforting structure.
- **Ask for help.** If you're having trouble managing stress and coping with uncertainty on your own, ask for help. Psychologists are experts in helping people develop healthy ways to cope with stress. Find a psychologist in your area by using APA's Psychologist Locator (<http://locator.apa.org/>) Service.

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