



# Taking care of yourself under stress

By Cari Michaels

Managing stress begins with self-care. Fortunately, there are many things you can do at home and on your own schedule to support your mental health, maintain healthy communication and prevent isolation.

**Accept feelings of anxiety, worry, fear, loneliness, boredom and grief** as they come. Know that these are completely normal responses to stressful situations.

**Shift your expectations** for yourself, your children and family members. Times of stress may not be business as usual and we all respond to it differently. Our needs will keep changing too.

**Look for moments that give you serenity**— the sky or sunset, birds flying overhead, animals around you, the beauty of nature.

**Practice mindful breathing.** Stress can lead to shallow breathing and an increased heart rate, and slow, deep breathing helps counteract this. Try a simple mindful breathing exercise called [“I am Here”](#). Or try [abdominal breathing](#), [box breathing](#) or [five finger breathing](#).

**Practice grounding yourself**, particularly in times of acute stress. For example, be still, look around you and notice: 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. These actions help orient you to the present moment.

**Take care of your body** – sleep and rest, stay hydrated, eat well, move and be physically active as you can.

**Keep a daily schedule** as it makes sense to you, with time for sleep, meals, movement, self-care, work, etc. This can help increase a sense of security and predictability. Take breaks and adjust your timelines as needed.

**Keep a gratitude list.** Writing down what we are grateful for supports an optimistic perspective and overall mental wellness.

**Meditate** – Find small things to do regularly. This makes it more possible to incorporate them into daily life. For example, spend one minute thinking about what you are grateful for rather than one hour in silent meditation. Find [guided meditations](#) that work for you.





**Control your news narrative.** Ask yourself what information you want to take into your mind and thoughts. What is helpful now? Choose what is most meaningful, not what happens to appear in front of you. Choose reputable sources and pay attention to how information affects your stress and anxiety.

**Remember activities you enjoy** and do more of them. Read, write, listen to or make music, call loved ones, paint, cook, garden.

**Connect with others.** Reach out to family, friends and neighbors. Social connections are an important part of wellness. Seek out online activities to build your connections.

**Communicate carefully.** Pay attention to how you speak and listen to others, particularly during times of stress. In general, speak carefully, listen attentively and respond accurately. Recognize that everyone responds to stress differently.

**Laugh.** It really is good medicine. Share stories, photos and videos with friends and family members.

**Take the long view.** Ask yourself “Who do I want to be on the other side of this stressful situation? How does that guide my behavior now?”

**Recognize what is out of your control.** Focus instead on what you can change and work on those if it helps relieve your stress.

**Be a role model** to others with your own self-care.



**For more information:**

Call the **Minnesota Farm and Rural Helpline** 833-600-2670 x 1

Visit the **Minnesota University of Minnesota Coping with Rural Stress** webpage: [z.umn.edu/ruralstress](https://z.umn.edu/ruralstress)