



Ascension

Coping with Political Stress

How to find peace within polarization

Are you experiencing stress related to the polarized political climate in the United States?

If so, you're not alone. Research finds that a majority of adults, over 70%, report that worry about the future of our nation is a source of significant stress in their lives. This kind of chronic, on-going stress can take a toll on our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Symptoms of chronic stress include:

- Insomnia or sleepiness
- Low energy
- Changes in appetite
- Unfocused thinking or "brain fog"
- Changes in emotional response to others
- Emotional withdrawal
- Negative or obsessive thoughts
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Physical responses like headaches, digestive issues and high blood pressure

Over time, chronic stress can also contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, PTSD and burnout.

If uncertain political times are leaving you feeling stressed, overwhelmed or worried about the future, there are some things you can do to help yourself feel better! And, the good news is that all of these strategies can be easily incorporated into your daily routine.

Take care of your mind and body

Exercise, sleep and a healthy diet create an important foundation to maintain (or boost!) mental health. Strike a balance between keeping up with current events and going about your daily life. Maintaining or improving habits in these areas is one of the most effective ways to reduce stress.

Limit news and social media

With political news available 24/7 through television and social media, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by constant political messages. Set boundaries around news and social media by limiting the time you spend watching political news each day. Consider turning off notifications from news apps and set a timer to limit the time you're accessing political-related news.

Practice relaxation strategies

If you currently use relaxation strategies to help manage stress, keep practicing them! You may find it helpful to engage in those strategies more often when stress levels are high. If you don't currently use relaxation techniques, consider finding a few to incorporate into your daily routine. Examples include deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, listening to calming music or spending time in nature.

Acknowledge your feelings

Emotional responses to political events will vary from person to person. Some will experience intense feelings while others will experience nothing at all. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions you experience and don't judge your personal experience or the experience of others.

Know when to walk away

People feel passionate about politics which can lead to heated conversations. If a conversation feels uncomfortable or overwhelming, it's okay to walk away. This can be as easy as disengaging from a group conversation, or asking for a break if you're talking to someone one-on-one.

Recognize your limits

Chronic stress can impact our ability to stay on task, focus and be productive. Remember that you may not feel as efficient as usual and that is okay! Plan accordingly by adjusting your schedule or your 'to do' list. Show yourself some kindness and ask for help or support, if needed.

Acknowledge what's in your control

Often, the things that cause the most stress are those that are completely outside of our control, politics included. Recognize that you cannot control the past, what people say or do or how political events unfold. However, there are plenty of things you can control, including your reactions, how you treat others, who you choose to spend time with, how you take care of yourself, and how you perceive the world around you.

Where can I go for additional help?

There are many mental health professionals who can help people cope with feelings of stress, worry and uncertainty. A great place to

start is your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). A counselor can meet with you to help you process your thoughts and feelings and provide additional strategies to cope. If you are thinking that maybe you should talk to someone, you probably should! Call today, we're here for you.

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