



## COVID-19: The Decision to Vaccinate

### Coping with the Stress and Anxiety




This March will mark one year that the COVID-19 virus threw our daily lives into a tailspin. The abrupt changes the virus has caused are challenging and have landed so many in a sea of physical and emotional pain. We've wondered when and how we may ever get back to something resembling normal. But as 2020 came to a close, we had a glimmer of hope when two COVID-19 vaccines became available to the public, and another on the verge of approval. Of course, with this new development comes decisions about getting our families vaccinated, which may result in more anxiety and stress.

#### The Stress Response- What is It?

The short story is that everyone experiences stress. Stress is a part of life and can often be a healthy reaction and helpful for short-term situations. However, prolonged stress and the response in our bodies (elevated blood pressure, increase in heart rate, a fight or flight response) can be quite harmful in the long-term because these reactions are cumulative, and can build up over time.

While people may understand and recognize a stress response, we may still be ill prepared to manage it. Stress can impact each of us a little differently so it's important to get familiar with what stress feels like for you. Stress often involves changes in the following areas:



-  **Emotions** such as feeling depressed; being anxious or fearful; feeling angry, overwhelmed, or guilty are common.
-  **Behavior** changes, such as an increase or decrease in energy, outbursts of anger, trouble relaxing or sleeping, and excessive worry can foster unhealthy habits, including an increased use of alcohol or other drugs.
-  **Physical** reactions may occur, such as headaches and other pains, stomach upset, sweating or chills.



**Thought** changes, such as having trouble remembering things, feeling confused, having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating, or having difficulty making decisions can also occur.

### Why the Anxiety and Stress over Vaccines?

If someone is feeling anxiety or confusion about the vaccine, it may be rooted in questions about how safe it may be for both themselves and family members. Fears about safety may be the result of how quickly vaccines have been developed and approved.

### Coping with Vaccine Stress

- Educate Yourself.** It's so often the unknown that creates anxiety and stress, so it may be helpful to gain as much information as you can. When doing your research, stick to reputable sites for information, such as The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#). When accessing the information, think about what is concerning you the most. Once you identify your own pressing concerns, you can search for the information that addresses the questions you have. The CDC's [COVID-19 Vaccines page](#) is a great place to start. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a video that explains more about the [Emergency Use Authorization \(EUA\)](#), used in the speedy approval of COVID-19 vaccines in the US. With an emergency use authorization, known and potential benefits must outweigh the known and potential risks before a vaccine will be approved for use. In other words, although the development process has been sped up, the aspects involving safety haven't been compromised.
- Know the Potential Side Effects.** Remind yourself that side effects may feel like flu and even affect your ability to do daily activities. Common side effects may include pain or swelling at the injection site, fever, chills, tiredness, or headache. Not everyone will experience these side effects, but if they arise, they typically diminish within a few days.
- Look to the Professionals.** Dr. Anthony Fauci (Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases) is a professional with a long history of managing emergent public health concerns. Dr. Fauci has been providing transparent information about the development of COVID-19 vaccines, including questions about how quickly they've been approved, and what this means with respect to safety and efficacy.



- **Take News You Find on Social Media with a Grain of Salt.** The vaccine has become a highly politicized topic, and the information you find on social media will likely reflect many different perspectives, and contain conflicting information depending on its slant. Instead, stick to more straightforward sources of information as described above.
- **Gather Information as it Relates to You.** If your anxiety about vaccination is overwhelming, talk to a professional that knows you and your personal medical history and needs. Your primary physician would be a good resource, as they can help address your unique concerns and questions.
- **Talk with a Mental Health Professional.** Communicating with a therapist can help you manage the emotions that may come up during this time. A therapist can offer strategies you can use every day, including identifying major stressors and helping you to develop a plan for how you can address your stress when it happens.

Whether it's related to the COVID-19 vaccine or not, stress, once recognized must be managed if we hope to be resilient and adaptable to what is happening around us. Finding positive ways to release stress such as exercise, deep breathing, reading, listening to music are essential ways to care for ourselves. Other self-care practices include sticking with a sleep pattern and avoiding foods high in sugar and carbohydrates. Minimizing caffeine and alcohol can also be helpful because these chemicals can trap stress in our bodies, and leave you feeling physically unwell. Acknowledging your stress by communicating with those you trust, including a therapist will also help you to manage stress more effectively, and help you to more clearly consider your vaccination options.



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