



# NEWS RELEASE

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December 28, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Coping with Fatigue**

Sterling, Colo. – December 28, 2020: Many have grown weary of the limits placed on activities and the extra steps required to follow the precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It all takes extra effort, and it isn't fun. These precautions are important to protect your health and the health of others, but they can be hard to sustain for months on end. These feelings are called "COVID Fatigue" or "Mask Fatigue" or "Caution Fatigue."

Regardless of the name, this fatigue happens when the energy that keeps you alert to danger and risk starts to run down. A feeling of resignation can also creep in, along with the attitude of "why bother?" However, giving in to that weariness and letting down your guard has consequences. We may be tired of COVID-19, but this virus is still spreading, and the evidence of the consequences of letting down is clear in the rise of cases and hospitalizations earlier this fall.

Early in the pandemic, fear and a sense of social responsibility combined drove most people to change their behaviors dramatically to slow the spread of

COVID-19, and it worked. The number of new cases, hospitalizations, outbreaks, and deaths stopped growing and then started to fall.

It took a lot of effort, willpower, and energy to deny everyone what they wanted – close social interactions, freedom to go anywhere, and getting back to previous routines. Willpower is like a muscle that gets tired and weakens with overuse. We grow numb after being in a high state of alert for extended periods of time. This happens even with everyday struggles we face between what we want in the short term and what we know is best for the long term. Examples include spending now or saving for the future, eating a tempting dessert or meeting a weight-loss goal. It is normal to experience a conflict between our emotional drive ("I want it now!") and rational control ("But think about the future"). The pandemic has created constant conflict between our emotional drive and rational control. There is an immediate benefit to giving up on caution. It feels good now. The benefit of maintaining vigilance is less clear with intangible probabilities of lowering your risk of getting or spreading COVID-19. Our human brains struggle when comparing a tangible present want with an intangible future good. How do we sustain safe behaviors when our emotions are tempting us to abandon them?

- Take care of our physical and emotional health. Eat healthy foods, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and practice stress management.
- Harness the power of habits and routine. One helpful coping strategy is to settle into a new routine that gives you a sense of security and predictability. Include regular bedtime and wake-up time, mealtimes, breaks, and activities that bring you pleasure. Making habits of wearing a

face covering when outside of your home and frequent handwashing can make these activities an unthinking part of our routine.

- Safely maintain and strengthen social connections. Our social lives have been disrupted the most by this pandemic and we need social interactions as human beings. Phone and online contacts are safe and can fill in for some of the in-person contacts we miss. Limited in-person connections may be more satisfying, so maybe you can go for a walk with a friend with appropriate physical distancing. The key to in-person connections is to limit the number of people gathering.
- Understand the graduations of risk for different types of activities. Restrictions and recommendations have changed with the prevalence of disease transmission. To make rational decisions about your behavior, take the time to learn what health experts have discovered about the risks of different activities.
- Focus on others. People make a common mistake about wearing masks to assume they are putting them on only to protect themselves. Masks are recommended to reduce the risk of spreading the droplets that carry the disease to others. Focusing on other people's health and safety can help maintain our motivation to practice safe, disease-prevention habits. Slowing the spread of COVID-19 is a collective activity that succeeds or fails based on all community members' behavior. Even if you don't feel at great personal risk from the disease, you are a larger community member in which many people are at great risk. When you do your part to keep the level of disease low in your community, you are helping to keep

hospitals from being overloaded, businesses thriving, saving jobs, and schools can remain open. Focusing on others has a selfish benefit as well. All of us feel better about ourselves and more optimistic about the future when we help other people.

Emotions can distort our judgment. Depression and extreme anxiety are high risks that need to be addressed. If feelings of sadness, anxiety, or loneliness interfere with your daily functioning, it is okay to ask for help. You can talk to a friend or a church leader. There are also mental health professionals you can talk with. For a list of local counselors, go to <https://www.nchd.org/behavioralhealth>.

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