

Caution Fatigue During the COVID-19 Pandemic

What is caution fatigue?

After months of taking precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic, many have grown weary of the limits placed on activities and the extra steps to take. Social distancing, quarantines, frequent handwashing, wearing masks, disinfecting surfaces, not touching your face—it all takes extra effort, and they can be hard to sustain for months on end. After a while, it can start to feel like too much. Mental health experts have come up with a name for this, caution fatigue. Caution fatigue is what happens when the energy that keeps you alert to danger starts to run down and your sensitivity to risk starts to lessen. You might find yourself washing your hands less often, forgetting your mask when you go outside, or socializing in risky ways.

Why do you tend to let your guard down?

- It takes willpower and energy to deny close social interactions, freedom to go anywhere, getting back to your previous routines—and willpower is like a muscle that gets tired and weakens with overuse.
- Your senses can grow numb after being in a high state of alert for extended periods of time. Your body isn't equipped to handle that hypervigilance for weeks and months on end.
- Social distancing means less in-person, social contact, which can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness and may get in the way of the day-to-day interactions you need to maintain your emotional balance.
- You may feel confined if you don't get outside. Emotions, like loneliness or frustration, can distort your judgment as you weigh risks in deciding how to act.

How do you sustain safe behaviors?

So how do you sustain safe behaviors when your emotions are tempting you to abandon them? There are several helpful approaches, including:

For more tips, log onto the member website at cascadecenters.com

For assistance

Call: 800-433-2320

Text: 503-850-7721

Email: info@cascadecenters.com

Taking care of your physical and emotional health:

- Eat a healthy mix of foods.
- Exercise regularly.
- Follow a healthy sleep routine.
- Avoid screen time on your phone, tablet, or computer in the hour before bedtime.
- Practice stress management.
- Avoid excessive alcohol and substance use.

Harness the power of habits and routine:

- Stick to a regular bedtime and wake-up time.
- Frame your day around regular mealtimes.
- Make space in your new routine for time outdoors, breaks to de-stress, and regular physical activity.
- Keep a clean mask and sanitizer close to the door so it's visible and close at hand when you go out. Create a specific place to leave your shoes when you come back home.
- Make time for activities that give you pleasure.



Strengthen social connections (safely).

- Phone and video contacts are safe and can fill in for some of the in-person contacts you miss.
- Limited in-person connections, following public health guidelines, are likely to be more satisfying than phone or video connections.
- The key is to follow safe practices as to the number of people who get together and whether you meet outdoors (safer) or indoors (less safe).
- Opening up about your emotions with someone you trust can be a step toward healing.

Understand the gradations of risk.

- To make rational decisions about your own behavior, take the time to learn about the restrictions in your community and what health experts have discovered about the risks of different activities. Don't simply rely on your assumptions about risk, which could be distorted by your emotions or by the fact you don't know anyone who has had the disease.

- Pay attention to the sources of your information, too. Try not to rely on secondhand information. Look at the websites of institutions with expertise in medicine and epidemiology (the science of how diseases spread).
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers good information on measures to protect yourself and people you care about from COVID-19. The CDC's recommendations are updated periodically as researchers learn more about the disease.

Focus on others

- Focusing on the health and safety of other people can be helpful in maintaining your motivation. By maintaining your caution, you are helping to keep hospitals from being overloaded and older and other at-risk people from becoming sick and dying.
- People who focus on others are more optimistic about the future and experience emotional benefits associated with altruism.

Ask for help.

If feelings of sadness, anxiety, or loneliness are interfering with your daily functioning, if you are losing or gaining weight, or if you are not sleeping well, these may be signs that you need additional help. Your EAP can help you find a mental health professional.

