

Take care of your mental health during pandemic

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(HealthDay)—It's crucial that you look after your mental health during

the COVID-19 pandemic, experts say.

"Historically, we know that pandemics and other [public health crises](#), much like [natural disasters](#), have a lasting impact," said Dr. Itai Danovitch, chair of the department of psychiatry and behavioral neurosciences at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Traumatic experiences have been associated with increased rates of substance use, post-[traumatic stress disorder](#) and depression, so Danovitch and his colleagues are trying to determine if such issues are occurring during the COVID-19 [pandemic](#).

He said that "national surveys are beginning to show what we expected, which is that there are increased prevalence rates of stress and depression."

They're "also seeing reduced initiation of treatment for patients with substance use disorders, and a reversal of last year's reduction in overdose death," Danovitch added in a hospital news release.

Along with other challenges, families with [school-age children](#) have the additional burden of adapting to online or hybrid learning, according to Suzanne Silverstein, founding director of the Psychological Trauma Center and Share and Care program at Cedars-Sinai.

She's especially concerned about the [long-term effects](#) on families dealing with instability, and those with children who have behavioral issues or other special needs.

"Everyone is struggling right now, but for these families, the loss of structure and routine can be especially daunting," said Silverstein, an expert in psychological trauma.

Families should create a [daily schedule](#) to keep children on task, and find new ways to have fun together at home, like scavenger hunts and virtual dance parties with friends and [family](#), she suggested.

It's important to establish and maintain a consistent routine, according to Danovitch.

"Make sure that you are exercising, getting good sleep and getting good nutrition," he said. "Make sure you're not spending too much time on screens, that you're not getting overloaded with information that you can't do anything about, but that you're getting information from reliable resources."

Connect with loved ones and find ways to be of service, Danovitch added.

"Having a sense of purpose is enormous. It allows people to cope with a lot of adversity," he said. "But if you are finding yourself having persistent anxiety or feeling so down that you're not able to function, ask for help. Reach out to your physician and get some support."

One positive aspect of the pandemic is that it's given many people's an opportunity to slow down, spend time with family, refocus on what's important, and connect with one another in new ways, according to the two experts.

"The other side of this coin is that events like this can be associated with post-traumatic growth," Danovitch said. "People develop resilience. They learn how to deal with [mental health](#) challenges, and they find resources, internal and external, that they didn't know existed."

More information: To learn more about mental health and coping during the pandemic, see the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and](#)

[Prevention.](#)

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