

Managing stress and anxiety during election season

As if 2020 wasn't already difficult enough with the stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and protests over social justice issues, the upcoming election adds another level of anxiety for many people. A study published by the American Psychological Association in 2019 found that 56% of Americans, regardless of party affiliation, felt stressed about the upcoming presidential election.¹ If you are feeling overwhelmed by the current political climate, you are not alone.

These feelings can have a negative impact on your emotional and physical health. Symptoms such as low energy, insomnia, loss of appetite, mood swings and tension are signs that you should not ignore. It is important to recognize what you can and cannot control as the election approaches.

You cannot control other people's opinions, beliefs, reactions or how they express themselves. Nor can you control others' votes. There are, however, many things you can control during and after the election:

- **The amount of time you spend on election news and discussions.** While the 24-hour political news cycle on television, radio and the internet is almost impossible to escape, you can limit the amount of time you spend on media each day.
- **The coverage, feeds and groups you follow.** When you are watching or reading election coverage, avoid negative-leaning discussions, especially if you feel constantly frustrated or upset by them.
- **How you interact on social media.** Avoid giving angry or emotional responses to posts that do not align with your views. You are unlikely to change other people's opinions; you are more likely to get unwanted and hostile feedback.
- **The time you spend with people.** Prioritize your relationships with positive family and friends. Strong social connections can reduce stress and help you feel happier and more energetic. If you and a friend or family member have differing political views, try not to discuss them.
- **How much you talk about politics at work.** A February 2020 Gartner survey found that 78 percent of employees talk about politics at work; a third of those employees find the conversations stressful or frustrating.² Limit or avoid political discussions at work. When you do engage, treat colleagues with kindness and respect, and be aware that political discussions can hamper teamwork and productivity.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2019/11/americans-significant-stress>

² <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/18/47percent-of-workers-say-the-2020-election-has-impacted-their-work.html>

- **How you deal with stress.** Whether it's meditation, going out in nature, reading a book or working on a hobby, take time every day to do something that makes you feel good. Make sure you get enough sleep and exercise, eat a healthy diet, and avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope.
- **How you use your time and talents.** Give your time and skills to a cause you believe in. If you have a strong interest in a political cause or candidate, offer to help with a campaign or other event.

If stress and anxiety about the election start negatively impacting your quality of life, contact your mental health provider, primary care provider or health plan for support.