

MANAGING OUR REACTIONS TO STRESS



How is the pandemic affecting physicians?

The current pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for everyone. Suddenly and profoundly disrupting our daily lives, it causes us to experience a wide range of stress reactions. These reactions are normal and are meant to help us protect ourselves.

How do our reactions to stress manifest themselves?*

Physical symptoms

- Headaches, neck tension, gastrointestinal problems, etc.
- Sleep problems
- Lower appetite
- Lower energy, fatigue, etc.

Psychological and emotional symptoms

- Virus-related worries and insecurity
- Negative vision of things or daily events
- Feelings of discouragement, insecurity, sadness, anger, etc.

Behavioural symptoms

- Difficulty in concentrating
- Irritability, aggression, withdrawal
- Difficulty in taking decisions
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs and/or medication, etc.

* Source: Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux. *Stress, Anxiety and Depression Associated With the Coronavirus COVID-19 Disease*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2020. [Online] <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2019/19-210-14WA.pdf>

Paying attention to our own stress reactions can prevent us from adopting behaviours that hamper normal functioning and that may be harmful to our health.

What can we do to manage our stress reactions when they occur?

- 1 Listen to your body**
Become aware of your reaction and acknowledge it.

- 2 Accept them without judgement**
Give yourself permission to react.
Have self-compassion.

- 3 Try to identify the root cause behind them**
What exactly am I afraid of? What am I worried about?

- 4 Talk to someone**
Your family and friends are a source of support and can help you find new coping strategies.

- 5 Take action**
When faced with a situation where you are experiencing feelings of powerlessness, it is important to focus on what you *can do* and what you *can change*. Once you've identified the source of your concern, ask yourself the following: What things can I control? What actions can I take to feel secure?

If your stress reactions hamper your ability to function, do not hesitate to ask for help from your colleagues at the Québec Physicians' Health Program.