

Managing election-related anxiety



Feeling stress and uncertainty about the upcoming election? If so, you're not alone. In a survey by the American Psychological Association and Harris Polls, 68% of people said the presidential election was a significant source of stress in their lives. That's up from 52% in 2016. And with the election and COVID-19 happening at the same time, feeling anxious is understandable. Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you manage election-related stress:

Avoid “doomscrolling”

It's important to stay informed. But sometimes looking at the news or social media is less about staying informed and more about dwelling on the bad. There's even a term for it: doomscrolling. Pay attention to how you're feeling while watching the news or checking social media. Are you feeling anxiety? Is your body tense? Is there information you actually need to find, or are you mindlessly scrolling?

If you want to limit your media intake, think through some boundaries that might be helpful. Maybe it's limiting yourself to certain sites or sources, or setting an amount of time each day you'll spend checking the news. Set a timer to hold yourself accountable. You can also put the TV remote in a new spot, or remove a particular site from your bookmarks — letting you access the news if you want to, but giving yourself a chance to think about whether you're just acting out of habit. You can also come up with alternative activities to try — like picking up a book or calling a friend — when you recognize yourself beginning to doomscroll.

Find ways to take action

Anxiety can come from worrying about the worst possible outcome and scenarios that are outside of your control. Instead, focus on what you can control. If you'll be voting, make a voting plan. Since voting might look different this year, it can be useful to think ahead.

Maybe you want to get it out of the way by voting early in person, sending your absentee ballot by mail or taking your ballot to at a drop-off site. Or if you plan to vote on Election Day, you can look up your polling place and ballot in advance and decide when during the day you plan to vote. (If you've made this kind of plan, you're also more likely to follow through on voting.)

Don't forget there are other ways to get involved. You can participate in a text bank or phone bank or even write letters to potential voters to urge them to support your preferred candidates. And there are plenty of causes that could use you as a volunteer even beyond the election.

Put your self-care methods into practice now

It's to be expected that election-related stress might increase as we get closer to Election Day. It's also possible that we might not know the results on election night. To help prepare, think about behaviors you can put in place now so you have some practice by the time Election Day rolls around. That way, you'll have activities ready to create a needed distraction or help ease anxiety.

Consider things like:

- An exercise routine or physical activity you enjoy
- A way of focusing on what you're grateful for, such as writing in a journal about things that you appreciate or that made your day better
- A mindfulness practice like "5, 4, 3, 2, 1": naming five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste
- A buddy who can be a source of mutual support
- Your favorite comfort food, movies, television or music — like meals you could treat yourself to or your favorite funny movie you haven't seen in a while

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