



COVID-19 Fatigue: Emotional Recovery & a Path Forward— We hear you. We see you. We can help.

Recovery is not always a straight line.

At the start of 2021, we saw the beginnings of a light at the end of a very long tunnel. With vaccine availability and lower case numbers, it seemed we were all poised to put the COVID crisis behind us. But the Delta variant had other plans, and seemingly knocked us off the journey to recovery. Or has it? The truth is, as with most challenging circumstances, the path to the finish line is not always straight, but that doesn't mean we're not still making progress. In time, we can still look forward to the gradual return of normalcy. We can take stock of what we have gained. But after a year and a half of coping with the pandemic's many challenges, how can we continue to move forward when we feel so exhausted?



Physical impact. We know the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on our physical health. Many have battled the virus itself or experienced the loss of a loved one. But even if this hasn't happened directly to you, the changes to our daily routines, the lack of exercise, rapidly changing family responsibilities along with worry and fear have left us at increased risk for things like cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Emotional impact. The collective trauma, grief and loss associated with all the disruptions in our lives has contributed to increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health factors. Addressing the physical health risks may begin with a vaccine, but perhaps the most challenging hurdle to overcome is the very real emotional impact of the pandemic—an impact that will weigh heavily for some and will take time to overcome.

How Does the Emotional Impact Show Up in Our Lives?

- ✓ **Burnout and sedentism.** Life was stressful before the pandemic. But new and rapidly changing challenges such as sending our children back to school, financial hardships, teleworking, keeping up with new information and coping with fear (sometimes all at the same time!) can be overwhelming. For many, this may have caused emotional burnout and reduced our ability to cope. We may find ourselves with less energy and motivation to do the healthy things we used to enjoy.
- ✓ **Feeling exhausted all the time.** You may not be getting enough sleep, working longer hours, or struggling with work/life balance. You may be exhausted from the emotional weight of the last 16 months, caregiving, and your day job. Or you may have no identifiable reason for new fatigue, but it's there. Just simply living in the pandemic is new. Our mind, even unconsciously, is taking on the mental work of living with uncertainty and that is exhausting. It requires a large portion of our attention and vigilance, all the time. Identifying the sources for you allows you to address them directly.

Experiencing aches and pains. Pandemic fatigue from stress or depression may be associated with elevated levels of inflammation in our physical bodies. Chronic stress can trigger innate immune response, inflammation, and fatigue symptoms. These symptoms are common during chronic stress, but reversible.

- ✓ **Remote work fatigue and burnout.** We used to transition from home to work, and we often had protected focus time while at work. Working at home while managing the needs of others, such as pets and small children, diminishes our ability to focus on one thing for a prolonged period. This type of multi-tasking and distractions also take their toll on our energy and well-being.
- ✓ **Mental Zoom fatigue** is partly due to this demand on our attention. We are used to interacting with people in person, where we get strong signals from them — from body language, voice, and emotional expressions. On Zoom, all we get are weak signals. We need to strain harder to read the situation, context, and content, all at the same time. Try limiting Zoom meetings to 50 minutes instead of the full hour to give yourself a break. You could also consider making phone calls instead.
- ✓ **Resurgence of challenges that 'thrive' in isolation.** Those with pre-existing challenges, including substance use (and recovery), eating disorders, anxiety and depression face additional challenges. Without support and accountability, recovery from eating disorders and substance use can be difficult. A lack of structure, more time in a potentially triggering environment and difficulty finding virtual support can lead to relapse. For those who are still active in their addiction, isolation has been a factor in continuing to engage in dangerous behavior.

Moving Forward—Healthy Habits to Practice

If you're feeling the weight of all these challenges, don't despair. Although it's out of our comfort zone, it is normal and expected. We didn't get here overnight, and we cannot expect ourselves to be able to bounce back as quickly as we'd like. The good news? We can take action to help make the path back to recovery a little easier. How we manage stress is crucial to both finding respite from the pandemic *and* eventually putting it behind us.

- **Continue to focus on the basics.** Our stress relief skills rely on a certain foundation to work well when we need them. Things like sleep health, exercise, and eating habits are basic building blocks to set the stage for reducing stress. These basics are a great place to start when we're feeling unsure because it's easier to set specific goals. You may want to start small and build on your success. For example, a goal to increase the amount of sleep you get each night can involve daily tasks to help ensure you'll succeed. This might include sticking to a sleep schedule or spending an hour each night engaging in a relaxing activity before bed. Taking care of ourselves by focusing on these basics can help with the bigger picture and help us to feel stronger and ready to participate when circumstances allow.

- **Find a silver lining (or two).** Think about the changes that have occurred, and intentionally seek out the good. Try to identify one thing that has become a benefit of the changes you've experienced over the past year. Are you saving gas money by not driving? Have you gotten one of those 'never enough time to do' tasks done? For some, the activity restrictions allowed for more quality time spent with family, or the ability to return to a hobby that once got lost in the shuffle of our busy lives. As human beings, we tend to focus our energies on the negative, or most difficult aspects of a challenge. Try to shift your focus to some of the outcomes that may have been a welcome change. Think about ways to incorporate some of these positives, even when we go back to "normal."



- **Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories,** including those on social media. It's good to be informed but hearing about the pandemic constantly can be upsetting. Consider limiting news to just a couple times a day and disconnecting from phone, tv, and computer screens for a while.

- **Connect with others.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling
- **Remember how far we've come.** Not only have we managed to get through an incredibly tough year, but it's also important to remind ourselves that even though we're still navigating, we have a much better map. When the pandemic started, we didn't know much. We didn't know how to keep ourselves safe, we weren't clear on what symptoms to look for, and doctors and hospitals were often at a loss as to what may help. We know a lot more now, which makes that navigation a little less daunting than it did in the beginning, and it can contribute to a greater sense of control. It's normal to feel a sense of exhaustion but knowing more may allow us to expend less energy in the process.
- **It's ok to not be ok.** It may not be optimal but vacillating between both good and bad mental health days is part of a healthy path to recovery. Building back our strength means listening to our bodies and our minds and knowing that it's ok to take a step back and slow down. Maybe today isn't a day to work on the goals you've set. Maybe today is about rest. Tune into yourself and try not to judge. The emotional burden of the pandemic has created more honesty and empathy around mental health, and this starts with us. Can you think of one thing you can do to slow down or give yourself a break?
- **If you find yourself stuck, reach out.** Although there may be ups and downs, if you find that you are having trouble focusing, or having difficulty controlling intense emotions such as sadness or anxiety, it's probably time to seek assistance.

Other Helpful Resources

- [Helping Children Cope](#)
- [Parental Resources Kit](#)
- [Care for Yourself](#)

Ulliance is here help you and your family with the challenges that arise during this transition. Connect with us for counseling, and other helpful resources today.



**Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling
for you & your family. 800.448.8326**