

Managing Your Mental Health During Election Season

Objective

To equip you with practical strategies to manage stress and anxiety during election seasons, promoting mental and physical well-being.

What to Know

Elections can trigger strong emotions, especially stress and anxiety. The process of electing a president can be particularly stressful, impacting mental health across an entire country. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), nearly 70% of Americans reported that the 2020 presidential election was a significant source of stress, highlighting the psychological effects elections have. Several factors contribute to increased stress during election seasons.

- Constant news coverage, social media discussions, and political advertisements can create overwhelm.
- Election outcomes can create uncertainty about the future, impacting financial, social, and personal stability.
- Heated debates and divisive rhetoric can strain relationships and increase stress levels.
- Individuals often feel a deep personal connection to political outcomes, further intensifying emotions.

Prolonged stress can lead to various health issues, including:

- increased anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.
- physical problems like headaches, digestive issues, and compromised immune function.
- unhealthy coping mechanisms such as overeating and substance abuse.
- withdrawal from social interactions.

Here are some strategies to cope.

1. Be selective about your media consumption. Set specific times for checking news updates and avoid media overload. Research and find credible news sources for updates to help avoid misinformation and unnecessary stress.

2. Regularly practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques. Meditation, deep breathing exercises, and yoga can help manage stress. A Harvard Medical School study found that mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) significantly reduced anxiety and improved overall mental health. Practicing simple mindfulness exercises can provide immediate stress relief.

3. Build social connections. Strong social support systems are vital during stressful times, so be sure to maintain regular contact with friends and family, focusing on positive and supportive relationships. Take breaks from political discussions if they become too overwhelming.

4. Engage in regular physical activity. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), even five minutes of aerobic exercise daily can begin to stimulate anti-anxiety effects. Add activities like walking, hiking, or group fitness classes into your routine.

5. Get plenty of restful sleep. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends adults get at least seven hours of sleep per night. Practice good sleep hygiene, such as maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, creating a restful environment, and avoiding screens before bedtime.

6. Limit alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine. Certain substances worsen anxiety and disrupt sleep patterns. Monitor and limit your intake of these substances, especially during high-stress periods like election season.

7. Get involved. Taking positive action can help you feel more in control. Engage in civic activities, such as volunteering or participating in community events, to build a sense of purpose and connection.

The stress and anxiety associated with presidential elections are real and impactful, but with the right strategies, the effects can be effectively managed. By practicing healthy habits, engaging in mindful activities, and building strong social connections, you can better navigate the election season with resilience.

What to Do

Review the suggestions above and choose one or two you can practice every day. Keep it simple to avoid overwhelm! Here are some examples of specific activities related to the above suggestions. Check off any that are of interest to you:

___ Set aside 10 minutes each morning for a guided meditation session. Apps like Headspace or Calm can be helpful.

___ Practice the 4-7-8 breathing technique (inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale for 8 seconds) three times a day.

___ Follow a 15-minute beginner yoga video three times a week to promote relaxation and physical well-being. Consider joining a local studio for a sense of community.

___ Keep a journal of your daily interactions with friends and family. Reach out to at least one person each day.

___ Plan a weekly virtual or in-person meeting with friends or family members where political discussions are off-limits. Focus on positive, supportive conversations.

___ Identify three people in your life who provide the most support and plan regular check-ins with them.

___ Schedule a 20-minute walk every day. Use this time to focus on your surroundings and practice mindfulness.

___ Use an app or journal to track your physical activities, aiming for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five times a week.

___ Limit your news and/or social media consumption.

___ Set a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, even on weekends. Track your sleep patterns in a sleep journal.

___ Develop a calming pre-sleep routine, such as reading a book, taking a warm bath, or practicing relaxation exercises 30 minutes before bed.

___ Track your daily consumption of alcohol, caffeine, and/or nicotine. Note how each substance affects your mood and sleep.

___ Identify healthier alternatives to these substances, such as herbal tea instead of coffee or a relaxing hobby instead of smoking.

___ Research and list local volunteer opportunities that align with your values. Commit to participating in one activity each month.

___ Attend or organize a community event focused on a non-political cause you care about. Engage with others to build a sense of community.

___ Set specific civic engagement goals, such as participating in a voter registration drive or attending a town hall meeting. Track your progress and reflect on the positive impact of your involvement.

Use the following chart to track your daily activities for one month. Note the date, describe the activity, and rate your stress level from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no stress or anxiety, to 10 = the worst stress or anxiety I have ever experienced. Finally, write down notes about the activity/describe the outcome. You may do more than one activity in a day, and there might be days you do not do an activity. That is okay!

Date	Activity	Stress / Anxiety Level (1-10)	Notes/Outcome

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Reflections on This Exercise

Did this worksheet help you reduce your stress and anxiety related to the upcoming election season? Why or why not?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
