



Coping with Stress after Hurricane Irma

Feeling stressed before or after a traumatic event like a hurricane is normal. But, this stress becomes a problem when we are unable to cope well with it and when the stress gets in the way of taking care of ourselves and family, going to school, or doing our jobs. Coping well with stress begins with recognizing how we are reacting and then by taking steps to manage our reactions in a healthy way.

Feeling emotional and nervous or having trouble sleeping and eating can all be normal reactions to stress, but they can have a negative impact on your physical health. Engaging in healthy activities and getting the right care and support can put problems in perspective and help stressful feelings subside in a few days or weeks.

The Florida Department of Health recommends the following tips to help manage your stress:

- **Follow a normal routine as much as possible.** Wake up and go to sleep at your usual times. Eat meals at regular times. Continue to go to work and school and do activities with friends and family.
- **Take care of yourself.** Do healthful activities, like eating well-balanced meals, getting plenty of rest, and exercising—even a short walk can clear your head and give you energy. If you are having trouble sleeping, do not drink caffeine or alcohol before going to bed and do not watch TV or use your cell phone or computer in bed. Avoid other things that can hurt you, like smoking, drinking alcohol, or using drugs.
- **Talk about your feelings and accept help.** Feeling stress after a traumatic event is normal. Talk to someone about how you are doing, as receiving support can make you feel better. Others who have shared your experience may also be struggling and giving them support can also help you.
- **Turn it off and take a break.** Staying up-to-date about a traumatic event can keep you informed, but pictures and stories on television, in newspapers, and on the Internet can increase or bring back your stress. Schedule information breaks. If you are feeling upset when getting the news, turn it off and focus on something you enjoy.
- **Get out and help others.** Volunteer or contribute to your community in other ways. This community support can be connected to the disaster-related needs or to anything else that you care about. Supporting your community can help you and others heal and see that things are going to get better.

Understanding the common emotional responses to extreme events can help you cope effectively with your feelings, thoughts and behaviors and help you feel more in control as you recover from the storm.

The Disaster Distress Helpline offers crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress after a disaster. The number for the helpline is 1-800-985-5990, and it operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Tips on Staying Safe and Healthy after a Flood

Food Safety: Preventing Foodborne Diseases

- People should not eat any food that may have come into contact with contaminated water from floods or tidal surges.
- Commercial cans and bottles of food should not be eaten if there is a bulge or opening on the can or screw caps, soda bottle tops, or twist-caps.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if labels are removed and cans are disinfected in a bleach solution. Use 1/4 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water; re-label the cans including expiration date and type of food. Assume that home-canned food is unsafe.
- When the power is out, refrigerators will keep foods cool for approximately 4 hours. Thawed and refrigerated foods should be thrown out after 4 hours.

Sanitation and Hygiene: Preventing Waterborne Illness

- Basic hygiene is very important during this emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water. Use only water that has been boiled or disinfected for washing hands before eating, after toilet use, after helping in cleanup activities and after handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Flood water may contain fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial waste and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and disinfected or boiled water.
- Apply antibiotic cream to wounds to reduce the risk of infection. If a wound or sore develops redness, swelling or drainage, see a physician.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater. They can be exposed to water contaminated with fecal matter. The same goes for pets.
- Do not allow children to play with toys that have been in floodwater until the toys have been disinfected. The same safety rule applies to pets. Use 1/4 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water to disinfect toys and other items.

Post Flood Clean-up

- Clean up debris carefully to avoid injury and contamination. Wear gloves to protect your hands.
- Chainsaws should only be operated in safe conditions (not in water soaked areas) and by people who are experienced in proper use.
- Lift heavy debris by bending knees and using legs to help lift.
- Wear shoes to avoid injury to the feet from glass, nails or other sharp objects.
- Avoid contact with downed power lines.
- Be alert to wildlife (snakes, alligators, etc.) that may have been displaced as a result of the flood or storm. If you see a snake or other wildlife, back away from it slowly and do not touch it. If the snake is in your home, immediately call the animal control agency in your county.

Tips on Eliminating Mosquito Breeding Sites

- If possible, have someone clean out eaves, troughs, and gutters of your home.
- Remove old tires or drill holes in those used in playgrounds to drain.
- Turn over or remove empty plastic pots.
- Pick up all beverage containers and cups.
- Check tarps on boats or other equipment that may collect water.
- Pump out bilges on boats.
- Replace water in birdbaths and pet or other animal feeding dishes at least once a week.
- Change water in plant trays, including hanging plants, at least once a week.
- Remove vegetation or obstructions in drainage ditches that prevent the flow of water.

