



## Dealing With Stress After A Natural Disaster

If your community was hit hard by Hurricane Katrina, you're probably trying to pick up the pieces and make sense of what happened. An event such as this creates a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety for those both directly and indirectly affected. In the days and weeks to come, you may begin having some of these common reactions

### Common Reactions

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Disorientation; difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Nightmares and reoccurring thoughts about the event
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Changes in eating patterns; loss of appetite or overeating
- Crying for "no apparent reason"
- Headaches, back pains and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping or falling asleep
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs

### Tips for Coping

It's normal to have difficulty managing your feelings after major traumatic events. Because everyone experiences stress differently, don't compare your progress with others around you or judge other people's reactions and emotions. Here are some tips for coping with stress:

- **Talk about it.** By talking with others about the event, you can relieve stress and realize that others share your experience and feelings.
- **Spend time with friends and family.** They can help you through this tough time. If your family lives outside the area, stay in touch by phone. If you have any children, encourage them to share their concerns and feelings about the disaster with you.

- **Take care of yourself.** Get plenty of rest and exercise, and eat properly. If you smoke or drink coffee, try to limit your intake, since nicotine and caffeine can also add to your stress.
- **Take one thing at a time.** Pick one urgent task and work on it. Once you accomplish that task, choose the next one. Completing each task will give you a sense of accomplishment and make things feel less overwhelming.
- **If you can, help.** Give blood, prepare “care packages” for people who have lost relatives or their homes or jobs. Volunteer in a rebuilding effort. Helping others can give you a sense of purpose in a situation that feels beyond control.
- **Avoid drugs and excessive drinking.** Drugs and alcohol may seem to help you feel better, but in the long run they generally create additional problems that compound the stress you’re already feeling.
- **Ask for help if you need it.** If your stress doesn’t begin to subside or is so strong it interferes with your ability to function in daily life, talk with a trusted relative, friend, doctor or spiritual advisor. You may want to make an appointment with a mental health professional to discuss how well you are coping with recent events. This could be especially important for people who had existing mental health problems or those who’ve survived past trauma. You could also join a support group. Don’t try to go it alone. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.