

COVID-19: STRESS AND THE WAY WE THINK

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There have been a lot of changes in our routines lately and a lot of us are feeling stressed and worried. This can affect how we feel, how we interact with those around us, how we eat, and how we sleep.

It can also impact how we think. When we're stressed, worried, and maybe not sleeping well, there may be short-term changes in our thinking skills:

- Struggling with working memory—the ability to keep things in-mind briefly. We may find ourselves feeling more forgetful or absent-minded. We may misplace things more often, or make careless mistakes we wouldn't usually make. Ever walk in a room and forget why you came in? Or think to yourself “I need to do XYZ as soon as this is finished” but have it slip your mind? Those are working memory lapses.
- We may also notice changes in the ability to focus, and find it harder to keep our mind on our work. We may find ourselves having to read something multiple times because our mind has wandered part-way through.
- We may have word-finding problems when speaking, making it harder for us to come up with a specific word (and have it on the “tip-of-our-tongue” for a moment).

While these events can be frustrating, they are common when people are stressed, worried, not sleeping well or feeling overwhelmed. If you have kids, you might recall some of these when your child was a newborn. Your sleep pattern was off, your daily schedule up-ended, your worry or stress increased, all of which could have impacted how you think and feel.

The good news is that these changes should be temporary. As our sleep improves, as our anxiety and stress decrease, and as our routine returns to normal (or as we settle into a new routine), our memory, working memory, word finding, and attention should go back to the way they were.