

Pandemic Fatigue and Mental Health

The first positive case of COVID-19 in the United States was confirmed in the state of Washington on January 20, 2020. Nearly two years later, more than [50 million](#) Americans have been infected with the virus and more than 800,000 have died.

Now COVID-19 cases are once again rising and the new omicron variant of the virus is sweeping the nation. As we look ahead at what could be another long pandemic-driven winter, health care experts are urging the public to stay the course and slow the spread.

The push to get everyone eligible vaccinated continues, and recommendations remain to wear masks and maintain physical distance in public spaces and to practice hand hygiene.

As the pandemic drags on, however, following COVID-19 prevention guidelines can feel like a challenge to maintain for many. A growing number of Americans are fed up and frustrated by the strain the coronavirus has put on daily life – also known as pandemic fatigue.

“Pandemic fatigue is really that we've existed in an environment where we've had certain restrictions that we had never had before. And I think our ability to maintain that is really waning at this point,” said Cheryl Crowe, vice president of Behavioral Health for OSF HealthCare.

Crowe says pandemic fatigue is a normal reaction to such a major overhaul to the way we live every day. We are grieving our pre-COVID-19 lives, as we look ahead to a long winter and continued restrictions.

“We're struggling because we have the desire to have those social connections, to get our normal life back again. So we tend to slip with our things like masking and being in smaller groups or staying out of a heavily public area. We're frustrated and we just want that normal back again. And so our ability to cope with those restrictions is a little bit strained at this point,” explained Crowe.

According to Crowe, the continued pandemic and the changes that come with it have also triggered a wave of mental health issues. Those dealing with addiction, depression, social isolation and general stress have been hit hard.

Crowe says people who are struggling shouldn't hesitate to reach out – whether that is to a friend or a mental health professional.

“Mental health right now is probably more important than it's ever been in a lot of ways. Our lives have been so disrupted and changed. Our social connections have changed. Our fear and anxiety related to this has really driven up a lot of mental health challenges for us, so don't feel bad in reaching out to your primary care physician or seeing a therapist talking to the doctor about anxiety, depression and what you can do about it,” she said.

Crowe continued, “Those may be things we never thought we would need before, and it's a different time now. We've experienced through this pandemic a lot of grief and loss of our normal lives. And if that's something we need to get us back on track, then that's something to absolutely pursue because our mental health is just as important as our physical health.”

If you want to reach out for assistance, OSF HealthCare offers free [behavioral health navigation services](#) to help understand all resources available in your area. [OSF Silver Cloud](#) is also available. The free mental health digital support tool is available in communities served by OSF.