

Overcoming Pandemic Fatigue

The first positive case of COVID-19 in the United States was confirmed in the state of Washington on January 20, 2020. In the nine-plus months since then, millions have been infected with the virus and more than 200,000 Americans have died.

The pandemic has dramatically changed the way we work, learn, and interact with one another.

Now, as a second wave of infections grips many parts of the country, health care experts are urging the public to stay the course and slow the spread. Restrictions are ramping back up, and recommendations remain to wear masks, maintain physical distance from others and to practice hand hygiene.

“As much as we get worn out with those things, we need to remember to stay the course, because we want this virus to turn around. We want it to abate, so we need to take those precautions,” said Cheryl Crowe, vice president of Behavioral Health for OSF HealthCare.

However, as the pandemic drags on, following COVID-19 prevention guidelines can feel like a challenge to maintain. The World Health Organization (WHO) is now warning of pandemic fatigue, something Crowe says is a major concern.

“So what we’re starting to see with people who are experiencing pandemic fatigue is that they are being much more lax about wearing the mask, or washing their hands, or the social isolation,” said Crowe. “We see alcohol consumption increasing, we see people who are over eating, oversleeping, or are not sleeping enough. A lot of those changes in behavior are because this has gone on for so long. We’re just starting to get weary.”

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 used to people and experiences and connections, and we’re missing those,” explained Crowe. “There is a kind of grief that’s going on with us for those simple things: running to the store with whoever is there, even if there’s a crowd; going out for experiences that we can’t do now. It’s such a change for us. We’re struggling.”

According to Crowe, the continued pandemic and the restrictions 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 the last nine months.

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

“The CDC is looking at studies right now, and what they are saying is that 40% of individuals who are doing the socially isolating, who are doing some of those things correctly are really struggling and are having poor mental health experiences,” she said.

Crowe continued, “I want you to know that there are services available and you need to reach out. You can reach out to friends, and that’s a wonderful tool, but if you need more than that there is nothing wrong with that.”

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.