

Coping During COVID-19: Tips for Self-Care and a Smoke-Free Start to 2021

COVID-19 has left many of us feeling anxious, isolated, and worried about our health and the health of our loved ones. Changes and disruptions to our work, school and finances has made the past year stressful for most people.

The mental and physical toll of this stress is a lot to deal with if you are also trying to stop smoking, or stay smoke-free. Yet, we know that not smoking (or using any other tobacco products) is one of the best ways to protect the health of you and your family at this time.

Smoking and Stress Relief

Studies from around the world are starting to show some common effects of living through a prolonged period of public health measures: isolation, physical distancing, and family separation are all having a negative impact on our mental health.¹

Unhealthy habits are common in times of mental distress. Smokers often cite tobacco and nicotine as their main tool for managing stress. It is understandable, then, that many smokers increased their tobacco use over the past year, or were unable to stay smoke-free if they had tried to quit.

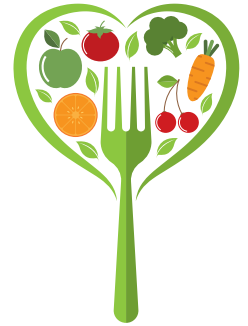
TAKE TIME FOR YOUR HEALTH

It's so important to find healthy habits and ways of coping to support your physical and mental health.



Take Care of You

- Eat nutritious food and drink plenty of water
- Get outside! Fresh air and regular exercise are good for both the mind and body
- Try to get enough sleep each night
- Be mindful of your drinking and other substance use
- Make time for hobbies and other activities you enjoy
- Limit your time on social media and don't believe everything you read



• Stick to the Facts

Being well-informed can help you take back a feeling of control and reduce anxiety. Look to trusted sources like the [Prince Edward Island Government](#), [Health Canada](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) for the most up-to-date information on COVID-19.

• Explore self-management strategies

Mindfulness, yoga, meditation, and relaxation techniques are all helpful practices to manage your stress and anxiety. Check out this free online series "[Staying Well in Stressful Times](#),"² for more tips about healthy ways to reduce stress, deal with emotions, and remain connected to others.

• Focus on the things you can control

COVID-19 has created a lot of uncertainty in our lives. Try to focus on what you can control right now instead of worrying about what's next.



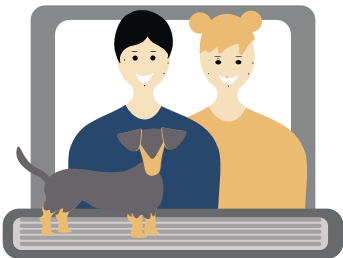
¹Galea, S., Merchant, R. M., & Lurie, N. (2020). The mental health consequences of COVID-19 and physical distancing: The need for prevention and early intervention. *JAMA internal medicine*, 180(6), 817-818; Pfefferbaum, B., & North, C. S. (2020). Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic. *New England Journal of Medicine*.

²Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions Program. 2020. Available at: <https://mha.nshealth.ca/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dr.%20Kinley%20Webinar%20Series%20hyperlinks.pdf>

Take Care of Each Other

• Stay Connected with Family and Friends

Isolating yourself from others can affect your mood. Find ways to connect with people you care about in other ways - you can still reach out by phone, text, or video call.



• Help Others

Ask friends, family members, or neighbours if they need anything, such as groceries or other household items. Checking in regularly by phone, text, or video call can make a big difference.

• Respect Others' COVID-19 Boundaries

Many people find the constant updates and media stories about the pandemic take a toll on their mental health. Your family, friends and co-workers may be trying to limit conversations about the topic for their own well-being. Your family and friends may also have a different comfort level with the current public health measures and be approaching life differently than you. Try not to be judgmental and respect people's boundaries during this challenging time.

Take Action for the Future

It can be hard to cope with the way our lives have changed during COVID-19, and you may be feeling sad, angry, or frustrated. All Islanders are encouraged to check out [Bridge the gAPP](#), a new online portal of self-help resources and links to local mental health resources. **If you are struggling with your mental health**, consider reaching out for professional help, rather than trying to manage on your own.

Counselling can be helpful for working through difficult thoughts and emotions. Phone and text services are available anytime for Islanders in distress – they can support you in the moment and help to connect you with local, in-person services:

The Island Helpline (Call: 1-800-218-2885)

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Kids Help Phone (Call: 1-800-668-6868 or Text: CONNECT to 686868)

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Crisis Services Canada (Text: 45645)

Available 5:00 pm – 1:00 am, 7 days a week

Although the pandemic has led to many unhealthy coping behaviours, it has also put an increased focus on health and has provided many smokers with even more motivation to quit. If you started smoking again due to the stress of COVID-19, be kind to yourself, and – most importantly – don't give up! Set a new quit date and try again. It takes most people many tries to quit for good.

If you are ready to quit smoking, you don't have to do it on your own – help is available!

- Talk to your healthcare provider
- Call the Smoker's Helpline: 1-877-513-5333
- Go online to learn more about the [PEI Smoking Cessation Program](#)



smokers'
helpline