

Tips for First Responders: Managing Stress After a Natural Disaster



Know the Signs of Stress¹

Your Behavior

- Increase or decrease in energy and activity levels.
- Increase in alcohol, tobacco or illegal drug use.
- Increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger or frequent arguing.
- Difficulty relaxing or sleeping.
- Frequent crying.
- Placing blame on other people for everything.
- Difficulty communicating or listening.
- Difficulty giving or accepting help.

Your Body

- Stomachaches or diarrhea.
- Headaches and other pains.
- Loss of appetite or overeating.
- Sweating or having chills.
- Tremors or muscle twitches.
- Being easily startled.

Your Emotions

- Anxious or fearful.
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun.
- Depression.
- Guilt.
- Anger.
- Wanting to be alone.
- Feeling heroic, euphoric or invulnerable.
- Not caring about anything.
- Overwhelming sadness.

Your Thinking

- Difficulty remembering things.
- Confusion.
- Difficulty thinking clearly and concentrating.
- Excessive worrying.
- Difficulty making decisions.

What You Should Know

As a first responder, you handle stressful situations. As you protect the public, you might lose sight of your own personal health and well-being. Pay attention to your own physical and mental health. Learn to recognize the signs of stress and take action to stay healthy.

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, it is common to go through a range of intense emotions and become overwhelmed.

Learn where to get help and find other resources on the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Responders** page:

[samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-responders](https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-responders)



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

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You can manage and alleviate stress by setting aside time for your own care and seeking out mental health services.

Know How to Relieve Stress¹

Keep Yourself Healthy

- Eat nutritious foods and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Exercise.

Use Practical Ways to Relax

- Regularly do things that help you relax. That can mean taking deep breaths, stretching, meditating, engaging in pleasurable hobbies, or doing something as simple as washing your face and hands.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities and do something fun after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax. Eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath or talk to family.
- Limit exposure to media.
- If needed, talk to a professional counselor or peer-support specialist.

Pay Attention to Your Body, Feelings and Spirit²

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of handling an event. Focus on the ways you handled previous stressful events.
- Connect with community support.

More Information

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration
National Helpline

800-662-HELP (4357)

Information: info@samhsa.hhs.gov

Disaster Distress Helpline

800-985-5990 (call or text)

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

988 (free, confidential, 24/7)

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention

cdc.gov/natural-disasters

[emergency.cdc.gov/coping/
responders.asp](https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp)

Texas Law Enforcement Peer
Network

972-336-1314

untdallas.edu/cpi/tlepn

UTHealth Trauma and Resilience
Center

713-486-2630

[med.uth.edu/psychiatry/trauma-
and-resilience-center](https://med.uth.edu/psychiatry/trauma-and-resilience-center)

Find your local mental health or
behavioral health authority here by
scanning the QR code or clicking on
the link below:



bit.ly/findtxlmha-lbha

1. Emergency Responders: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself, emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp; SAMHSA Tips for Healthcare Professionals, store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/PEP20-01-01-016_508.pdf

2. First Responders and Disaster Responders Resource Portal, samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-responders