

Politics Stressing You Out?

Five steps to feeling better

Are you finding yourself stressed or worried about the upcoming U.S. national election? If so, you are not alone. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, 56% of Americans report the upcoming presidential election as a significant stressor. This is an increase since the 2016 election, which is not surprising given the coronavirus pandemic and the likelihood of an uncertain outcome on Election Day. However, we can better protect ourselves from the emotional impact of this election season by strengthening our understanding, preparation and self-care.

Why are politics so stressful?

There are several reasons politics can feel so stressful. Elections introduce uncertainty about political outcomes. Many people worry about the impacts to their lives or communities if a particular politician or party wins. Elections, and politics in general, also create interpersonal conflict. We are social creatures who depend upon each other, and conflict within our social groups – friends, family members, co-workers, and even strangers – can threaten our sense of belonging. Given the divisiveness of our political climate and the prevalence of uncivil dialogue on social media, it is no surprise that recent elections and political events have generated acute stress for many people.

Five steps to cope with political stress

1. **Limit your news consumption.** The 24-hour news coverage is designed to keep you on high alert, waiting for the next “big story” to be revealed. Don’t take the bait. Instead, find one or two news sources you trust to stay informed – but **limit your time with them!** It is OK to find out about news after it breaks. Pay attention to your mood and physical reactions while consuming the news; if you feel anxious, agitated or angry, these are cues to turn it off.
2. **Take a social media break.** Like the 24-hour news cycle, social media is designed to stimulate strong (mostly negative) emotional reactions. Studies have shown that social media use is linked to increased feelings of stress, loneliness, and depression. Limit your use of social media to once a day **at most**, or take a break from it altogether.
3. **Focus on what you can control.** Most of what is happening in national and global politics is out of our personal control. Turning our attention to ourselves, our friends, families and local communities can help us be empowered and productive. Focus on your personal wellbeing by engaging in things you enjoy such as hobbies, exercise and time with friends. If you enjoy being politically active, find one or two meaningful causes to which you can donate your time or money.
4. **Live your values.** One way to impact politics *and* decrease stress is to make sure our daily lives are closely aligned with our values. Values are fundamental beliefs that guide behaviors. With a clear sense of our own values, it is easier to maintain focus on what we find important and what we can control.

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5. **Seek community.** Find people you trust to share your thoughts, feelings and concerns. Make sure they are people who will listen without judgment. Rely on friends, family or community groups who can help you laugh or find distractions during stressful times.

If you are experiencing stress related to the election, please know that you are not alone. KGA, your Employee Assistance Program, is **available 24/7** with **free** and **confidential assistance** from an experienced team of counselors.

Contact KGA: [800-648-9557](tel:800-648-9557), text/chat us at My.KGALifeServices.com, or info@kgreer.com. For easy access download our free app: **KGA Mobile**.