

## Essential workers: Please check in with yourself

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Now in its third year, with **over 485 million confirmed cases, six million deaths, and 11 billion vaccine doses administered and counting**, the global COVID-19 pandemic finally seems to be largely under control.<sup>1</sup> Whether you are an essential worker in healthcare or another critical role, thank you for helping get us all this far.

Hopefully, you are doing well, and have gotten and taken some time off from the whirlwind of the pandemic to reflect, restore and reset. Now that the pandemic is shifting into an epidemic, you may feel some relief. Take pride in your own contribution and accomplishments as an essential professional working through one of the most difficult times in recent history.

However, as a result of the chronic workplace stress and exposure to trauma, there's the possibility you may be feeling distress, and/or finding it difficult to function in social, work or family activities. You also may feel the impact of the crisis through a stress-related disorder, compassion fatigue or burnout, all of which can



manifest after the fact, including as your body's natural stress response mechanisms revert to your non-chronic stress hormone production levels.

With this in mind, please consider what your recovery, health and wellness needs may be, as someone who put their own safety at risk facing the pandemic head on.

If you do feel distressed, please know you are not alone. Healthcare professionals and other essential workers experienced increases in anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns throughout the pandemic. Consult with your physician or a mental health professional for help assessing and treating your condition.

Now is also a good time to take a break and check in on your general physical health and wellness. A first step is of course covering the basics of getting enough sleep, exercising regularly and eating nutritious foods.

It also is recommended to keep up to date on immunizations, tests and screenings for COVID-19,

as well as for other diseases or infections, As you likely are well aware, an essential part of staying healthy is finding and treating problems early. So, consider whether your preventive health care screenings are up to date.

Depending on your current health, age and sex, there are recommendations for screenings to consider. (Note: You can find general guidelines for which screening tests and vaccines are recommended based on your age and sex on My HealthFinder from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)

In addition, consider your vaccination statuses. Even if the worst of the pandemic likely is behind us, COVID-19 and the potential of other viral infections remain. As far as COVID-19, vaccinations are effective at preventing infection, serious illness, and death. Even though some people who are fully vaccinated get breakthrough cases of COVID-19, most of these breakthrough cases carry only mild or moderate symptoms.

Another benefit of being vaccinated is a lower risk for experiencing long-term COVID-19 symptoms.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, which researchers are still studying, people are reporting new, returning or ongoing health problems four or more weeks after first being infected. This includes those who had initial mild or asymptomatic acute infection.<sup>3,4</sup> People report experiencing different combinations of symptoms, including difficulty

breathing or shortness of breath, fatigue, difficulty thinking, chest or stomach pain, heart palpitations, joint or muscle pain, diarrhea, change in smell or taste, etc. (Get a complete list of symptoms and the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions interim guidance for healthcare providers.)

As an essential professional, these are all things you likely know. With that in mind, please accept this as a gentle reminder to be sure to take care of yourself, too.



**If you need a little more support,  
reach out to your Employee  
Assistance Program.**

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