

WILDFIRE SMOKE FACTSHEET

Coping with the Stress of Wildfire Smoke



Smoke from a wildfire can be a stressful reminder of a nearby threat. Even if there is no immediate danger, smoke from distant fires can be in the air for days or even weeks. Smoke can cause stress by limiting your daily outdoor activities, isolating you from friends and family, and disrupting your daily routines. Smoke can also trigger negative memories of other fires. Paying attention to how you and your loved ones are feeling, and knowing the steps to reduce your smoke exposure can help you effectively cope with the stress of smoke.

Common signs of stress

Stress can look different in different people.

Some signs to look out for include:

- Feelings of worry, frustration, anger, or sadness.
- Loss of appetite.
- Tiredness or loss of energy.
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions.
- Nightmares and trouble sleeping.
- Headaches, upset stomach, and skin rashes.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- More use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

In children, this could also include:

- Clinging, fears, acting like a younger child.
- Uncooperative behaviors, irritability.

If any of these reactions interfere with your daily activities for several days, contact your healthcare professional. If you or someone you love is in crisis, call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.

Steps to care for yourself

- Take care of your body: eat healthy, stay hydrated, get plenty of sleep, and exercise when and where it would be healthy for you to do so.
- Connect: share your feelings and keep in touch with friends and family members.

- If your community has cleaner air spaces, such as the library or a shopping mall, plan to spend time with people there.
- Take breaks: make time to unwind and do the things you enjoy.
- Ask for help: talk with counselors, health professionals, or someone else you trust about your feelings and concerns.

Steps to reduce your smoke exposure

- Stay informed. Listen to or read local [Air Quality Index](#) (AQI) reports and updates on fires and smoke from air quality or fire officials.
- When smoke is present, check the [Fire and Smoke Map](#) and look for Smoke Outlooks for your area.
- Take steps to reduce your smoke exposure. Check the AQI daily for forecast and current air quality information to decide when you can be active outdoors.
- Air quality can change rapidly. Don't see or smell smoke? It may be a good time to go outside.
- Exercise indoors if your indoor air is cleaner than outdoor air.
- Keep your [indoor air at home](#) as clean as possible.
- Consider creating a clean room at home, especially if children, older adults, pregnant women, or people with heart or lung disease live there.

- If indoor air quality in other places where you spend time is poor, [have a plan](#) for how you can reduce your smoke exposure.

Steps to care for children

- Make sure to access the mental health resources you need to process your own emotions. Children pick up on how adults are reacting.
- Be a role model. Modeling calm behaviors is important in stressful times because children will take their cues from you. It can be extremely stressful for children if living conditions change.
- Keep children active and engaged in their normal activities as much as possible.
- Respond to questions openly and honestly. Keep your responses simple and appropriate for each child's age.
- Monitor children's exposure to media and social media coverage of the event and talk with them about information that they may see.
- Review your family's safety plans. Reassure children that you have a plan to keep them safe.
- Use the AQI forecast and current air quality information to plan children's outdoor activity when air quality is better.
- Help children meet up with friends in places with cleaner indoor air.
- Coordinate with children's care provider if you have concerns about their smoke exposure or how they are coping at school or during childcare.
- Review age-appropriate information for helping kids through disasters at The National Child Trauma and Stress Network website listed below.

For More Information:

Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Event: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

Using the Air Quality Index: <https://www.airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics/using-air-quality-index/>

AirNow Fire and Smoke Map: <https://fire.airnow.gov/>

Wildfires and Indoor Air Quality (IAQ): <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/wildfires-and-indoor-air-quality-iaq>

Reduce Your Smoke Exposure factsheet: <https://www.airnow.gov/publications/wildfire-guide-factsheets/reduce-your-smoke-exposure/>

Other Wildfire Guide factsheets: <https://www.airnow.gov/wildfire-guide-factsheets/>

Resources for Children and Adults Who Care for Them:

Helping Children Cope with Disaster: https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/helping_children_cope.pdf

Helping Children Impacted by Wildfires factsheet (NCSTN): <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-guidelines-helping-children-impacted-wildfires>

Help Kids Cope app (NCSTN): <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/help-kids-cope>

Ready Wrigley children's books: <https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readywrigley/books.htm>

Why is Coco Red? children's book: <https://www.airnow.gov/publications/why-is-coco-red/why-is-coco-red-picture-book/>

