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PRESS RELEASE



LIFE AFTER THE PANDEMIC: TIPS TO NAVIGATE THE NEW NORMAL

With Many COVID Restrictions Lifted, This Unique Period of Transition Can Cause Stress & Anxiety

(Toms River) – Residents in Ocean County have anticipated the moment when life can return to “pre-pandemic normal.” But as we seem to get a little closer to that reality with every new day, many are now feeling increased stress and anxiety about getting back to the “way things were before” this unprecedented health crisis.

A recent survey from the American Psychological Association (APA) found that nearly 50% of adults reported feeling uncomfortable about returning to in-person interactions when the pandemic ends. Even 48% of who have received the COVID-19 vaccine report feeling the same way.

“The lives we got used to the past year are now changing,” said Daniel Regenye, Ocean County Health Department (OCHD) Public Health Coordinator/Health Officer. “Whether you have family members going back to school or work, or if you’re heading back to on-site work yourself, a period of emotional adjustment may be needed while people settle back in.”

“We’ve all been waiting a long time for things to return to the way we knew them before the pandemic,” said Ocean County Commissioner Gerry P. Little, liaison to the Ocean County Board of Health. “But getting back to that sense of normalcy will be a unique and personal experience for each of us so we should try and be considerate of that in our daily dealings with family, friends, neighbors and colleagues.”

COVID-19 lockdowns increased “reentry anxiety:”

During COVID-19, social anxiety is more acute and common. Most people have been staying at home and avoiding social interactions for the past year due to COVID-19 guidelines put in place for our health and safety.

There’s still uncertainty;

As guidelines change or businesses reopen, you might be wondering if it’s safe to see your elderly grandparents or eat indoors in a restaurant. Or if your workplace announces that you will be returning to the office, you might have very legitimate concerns about what that means for your own safety and your family’s.

Even with three effective vaccines in use, there’s still a lot of uncertainty about what’s going to happen in the near future. Concerns such as how will the new variants affect us, or how long these vaccines will last and did we relax restrictions too soon are just some questions people have.

How to feel at ease as we reenter work and society;

A recent study in April found that 10.8% of people met the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after returning to work. Following personal protective measures - such as wearing face masks - reduced psychiatric symptoms and made people feel more confident. It also helped when workplaces listened to employees concerns and increased workplace hygiene. It’s

important to use the science and guidance from experts and the Centers for Disease Control as a blueprint for your behavior, and stay up-to-date as it changes.

Reduce Anxiety by Creating a New Normal

Fortunately, there are some steps you can take provided by the Boston University Psychotherapy and Emotion Research Center to help dial down reentry stress, whether or not you are vaccinated.

- Coming up with a new routine to replace your pandemic rituals (such as a weekly video conference call with friends) is a key way to introduce some level of predictability into post-pandemic life. That's because the routines of daily life have a big impact on how we view the world. Studies suggest having a routine was strongly associated with the feeling of living a meaningful life.
- So go ahead and commit to a weekly outdoor workout or walk with a friend. But just because you adopt new rituals doesn't mean you have to toss out habits you've acquired during the pandemic, particularly if they feel beneficial.

Make a Leap Into the Future

- Think about making travel plans. Arranging future travel plans will give you a sense of positivity.
- Plus, scheduling concrete experiences will ensure that you move forward even if it feels scary. Forcing yourself into situations that may make you anxious, even once it's safe to do so, can be the best way to overcome those anxieties.

Work Within Your Comfort Zone

- Rather than going to a movie theater or eating indoors at a restaurant, you may want to try outdoor socializing with a small group of vaccinated people. In other words, take it slow. If it makes you feel safer to wear a mask, even when you're with a vaccinated group, do it.
- Masks will likely be a part of life moving forward anyway, especially during cold and flu season.

But Push Your Limits a Bit

- For people with a preexisting social anxiety disorder, more than a year of lockdowns and physical distancing has likely taken a toll and perhaps exacerbated anxious tendencies. But it's crucial for people with social anxiety to fight the urge to remain isolated. If you feel like you need extra support, a therapist may help.

Treat Yourself With Love

Regenye went on to say that you need to be kind to yourself as life begins to return to its pre-pandemic rhythms. Take it slow and remember it's ok to have these feelings. But if you're feeling overwhelmed or depressed don't hesitate and reach out to your healthcare provider.

To learn more about pandemic stress and anxiety visit www.ochd.org or www.cdc.gov. You can also follow the Ocean County Health Department on Twitter@OCpublichealth or like us on Facebook. Download the Ocean County Health Department mobile app free from the Google Play/Android and Apple APP stores.