



Stay healthy

Women's health during COVID-19

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

Women often feel overworked and overwhelmed. After all, you have a lot on your plate. And you may feel like that plate is overflowing with demands since the pandemic hit.

It's important to recognize how COVID-19 may be impacting your life and relationships so you can take steps to improve your wellbeing.

The mental load

Even as spouses and family members have stepped up to help more with caregiving and other household duties, women often carry the "mental load." Sometimes referred to as "worry work," the mental load includes all the invisible work that comes with managing a home and family. Women may not be doing all these family tasks, but they're often in charge of them.

Many women oversee the family calendar, household chores and tasks. This means women often have endless to-do lists running through their heads. This mental load adds to stress and can take a toll.

If you're struggling with the mental load, here are some things to consider:

- Talk to your partner about your role as the "manager" and how it creates stress
- Provide clear examples of the invisible tasks you manage (appointments, chores, grocery lists)
- Share planning and management tasks as well as housework
- Let your partner do tasks in their own way

Your relationship health

Sharing the mental load can help reduce your stress and improve your relationship. But you may find that increased togetherness is highlighting other relationship issues.

Even during the best of times, relationships take work. When you add the anxiety and stress of a pandemic with social isolation, your relationship can feel the strain. Here are some tips from relationship experts:¹

- Show appreciation, not criticism
- Have empathy for your partner
- Talk less, listen more
- Find some alone time
- Ask for what you want

¹Luscombe, Belinda. [Can your relationship survive the togetherness of a pandemic? Here are 11 things couples' therapists recommend.](#) Time. Accessed April 2021.



When it's more than stress

But some women are experiencing more than relationship stress during COVID-19. Domestic violence has been on the rise since the pandemic hit.² Relationship abuse can include:

- **Physical abuse.** Punching, pushing, slapping, property damage and more
- **Sexual abuse.** Forcing or manipulating you into sex, accusing you of cheating
- **Financial abuse.** Controlling all cash and credit cards or running up debt in your name
- **Psychological abuse.** Making threats, isolating you from others, name-calling and more

MyPlan is a new app that helps people experiencing relationship problems. It can help you decide if your partner's behavior is abusive. And then it connects you with resources that fit your situation.

If you're in an abusive relationship, it's important to get help. Couple's counseling is not recommended in these situations, but The National Domestic Violence Hotline is a good resource. You can contact them at **1-800-799-SAFE** or thehotline.org. Be sure to use a phone or computer that can't be accessed by your partner, since he or she might be monitoring your use.

Caring for other relationships

Close friendships can help you manage life stress. But friendships and other relationships were easier before COVID-19. You could go to parties, events or quick get-togethers. Now, even casual coffee dates are harder to arrange. So how do you nurture your important connections?

- **Be intentional.** You're less likely to run into friends the way you used to. Make a point to reach out, see how your friends are doing and schedule safely-distanced social time.
- **Be creative.** Video calls are great, but you may be tired of them. So try other things, like meeting up with one or two friends outdoors or scheduling a remote movie date using a "Party" streaming service.
- **Know your risk.** Any in-person interaction will come with some risk. Some people are forming very small "social pods." These are small groups of people who know each other and communicate well. They often agree to limit socializing just to their "pod" to reduce the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.

Life comes with stress. And COVID-19 is showing just how much we depend on one another. Make time for healthy relationships and seek help if you need it.



If you or a loved one needs help, reach out to your employee assistance program (EAP), primary care physician or a mental health professional. The following resources may also provide support or resources for you and your family.

National resources for women:

- **Women, Infants and Children Program.** Provides supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education for low-income pregnant and postpartum women and for infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk.
- **Office of Women's Health, US Food and Drug Administration.** Provides resources to help women make healthy choices for themselves and their loved ones.

Resources for women experiencing violence:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233); 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
- National Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- National Victims of Crime Hotline
1-855-4-VICTIM; (855-484-2846)

Resources for caregivers:

- **Caregiver Action Network** provides a peer forum, a story sharing platform, tools, support and resources.
- **Eldercare locator** connects caregivers to services, information and resources for older adults.

Resources for women with a child with disabilities:

- **The Autism Society** provides information, service referrals, advocacy, education and support to help improve the lives of those affected by autism.
- **Parent to Parent USA** matches parents with a fellow parent who has a child with the same special healthcare need, disability or mental health concern. This provides each parent or family with a contact for sharing information, receiving support and creating new friendships.

- **National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability (NCWD)/Youth** focuses on young teens and helps them to learn how to cope with their disability and find their place in the workforce.
- **The M.O.R.G.A.N. Project** stands for Making Opportunities Reality Granting Assistance Nationwide. This group, established by parents Robert and Kristen Malfara, supports families in their journey of raising or fostering a child with special needs.
- **Family Voices** "aims to achieve family-centered care" for all children with special needs. Family Voices provides families with the "tools to make informed decisions" about healthcare and education, build partnerships between families and their service providers and serve as a trusted resource on healthcare.

We are here for you 24/7.
Remember, you're not alone.



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