

## Maintaining Your Health Afterwards

Over time, your impressions and understanding of your experience will change. This process is different for everyone. No matter what the event or your reaction to it, you can follow some basic steps to help yourself adjust to the experience:

- Reach out for help and support, people really do care
- Reconnect with family, spiritual, and community supports
- Consider keeping a journal
- Do things that help you refresh and recharge yourself whether that is spending time with others or alone
- Remember that "getting back to normal" takes time
- Appreciate a sense of humor in yourself and others
- Your family experienced certain parts of the disaster along with you, understand and communicate with them
- Avoid the overuse of medications or alcohol
- Get plenty of rest and regular exercise
- Eat well-balanced, regular meals



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Pamela J. Manns

## Additional Resources

**Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Resilience Resources**  
[http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/resilience\\_resources/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/resilience_resources/index.html)

**U.S. National Response Team (NRT)**  
Guidance for Managing Worker Fatigue During Disaster Operations  
[http://nrt.org/production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-1049TADFinal/\\$File/TADfinal.pdf?OpenElement](http://nrt.org/production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-1049TADFinal/$File/TADfinal.pdf?OpenElement)

**Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**  
Tips for talking about disasters  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/Disaster/traumaticevents.aspx>



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**Safety and health at work for all people through research and prevention.**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

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## Managing Your Stress Tips for Deepwater Horizon Response and Volunteer Workers

Stress and fatigue are natural reactions when people respond to a disaster. As a Deepwater Horizon responder, you are at risk of feeling uncomfortable levels of stress. This is due to the unexpected and sometimes troubling changes to the natural order of things and the interruption of your normal routines.

This pamphlet describes the range of ordinary reactions to stress that you may experience during your work or in the weeks or months that follow. It is important to monitor your health and well-being during this entire period, even months after your response work has ended.



## Symptoms of Stress

The symptoms can appear immediately, or may occur weeks or months later. They include the following:

### Physical Complaints

Physical complaints may include fatigue, upset stomach or vomiting, dizziness, heavy sweating, thirst, headaches, vision problems, jaw clenching, nonspecific aches and pains or disturbed sleep. **You should seek IMMEDIATE medical attention for severe symptoms such as:**

- chest pain or other severe pain
- difficulty breathing
- signs of shock (shallow breathing, rapid or weak pulse, nausea, shivering, pale and moist skin, mental confusion, or dilated pupils)

### Thinking Problems

Stress can create confusion, loss of awareness, poor concentration, and reduced attention span. It may be difficult to make decisions or solve problems. You may not be able to stay focused, which could affect your ability to work safely.

### Emotional Concerns

Strong emotions from stress may include anxiety, guilt, denial, grief, fear, irritability, sense of failure, or feeling overwhelmed. If any of these symptoms don't go away after three weeks or if they interfere with daily life, seek support from a professional experienced with disaster counseling.

### Behavioral Changes

Intense anger, withdrawal, emotional outbursts, change in appetite, and restlessness can result from stress. These behaviors should become less frequent over time.



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Patrick Kelley

## Recommendations to Monitor and Maintain Your Health On-Site

You may not recognize the need to take care of yourself and to monitor your own emotional and physical health. This is especially true as response work stretches out beyond weeks and into months. You must stay alert while on the job to take care of your own health and safety. Guidelines while at your job site and after you return home include:

### Onsite

- Pace yourself
- Watch out for your co-workers
- Be aware; stay focused
- Take frequent rest breaks
- Eat and sleep on as regular a schedule as possible
- Drink plenty of fluids such as water and juices
- Eat a variety of food, especially carbohydrates and whole grains
- Take breaks away from the work area
- Eat and drink in the cleanest area available

Monitor your mental and emotional health:

- Recognize and accept what you cannot change
- Talk to people when **YOU** feel like it. Talking about an event may make you feel like you are reliving it. Choose your own comfort level
- If your employer provides formal mental health support, use it
- Allow yourself to feel sad, tired or discouraged from time to time; you are in a difficult situation
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks can be common. Do not try to fight them. They should decrease over time
- Communicate with your loved ones at home as often as possible



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer Prentice Danner