

# BE MINDFUL OF COVID-19'S MENTAL HEALTH TOLL

The second wave of COVID-19 is here.

Case counts are higher. Hospitals are filling up, as are Ontario's intensive care unit beds. Care has been delayed. Industries have been devastated. People have lost work, lost family members, lost houses.

The cost of the pandemic on our health and our lives has been brutal, and many struggle to feel okay.

I ran a keyword search of our office's patient records. I wanted to look at



**DR. NADIA ALAM**  
Column

overall numbers of visits that mentioned the words depression, anxiety, mood and stress. Between March and September 2019, there were 286 visits that noted the occurrence

of these words. This year, there have been 1,597.

Other pandemics and large-scale disasters followed similar patterns. After the shock of the initial impact wore off, living with a global crisis begins to take its toll. Coping mechanisms fail, and compounding psychosocial stressors strain even the most resilient personalities.

Mental distress rises, leading to depression, anxiety, irritability, insomnia, fear, confusion,

anger, substance use, domestic violence and child abuse.

Why? As a community, we now face incredible uncertainty: aside from impact of the short-term illness, the virus also has long-term health impacts that we've only just begun to see. We worry about how we'll get through this as we hear about global shortages of testing supplies, health-care workers, personal protective equipment, medications and vaccines.

We are a people who value our independence — values that are tested by public health stay-at-home orders. Conflicting messages from authorities around the world challenge our trust in the institutions in our lives — government, health care, policing and so on.

So what can you do? Stop obsessing over social media. Double down on self-care. Meditate. Use apps like Headspace. Watch out for one another. Use self-help resources

like [bouncebackontario.ca](https://bouncebackontario.ca) and the Mindshift CBT app. Work on your sleep routines. Eat as healthy as you can. Exercise. Access emergency assistance if you or your kids are facing violence at home. Call your family doctor.

It is okay to not be okay. It is okay to get help. Staying silent at this time is not an option.

*Nadia Alam is a Halton physician and past president of the Ontario Medical Association. Her columns also appear on [www.drnadialam.com](https://www.drnadialam.com). She can be reached through her website.*



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