



## Important Health Information

### East Village Building Collapse and Fire (Second Avenue and East 7<sup>th</sup> St.)

Smoke from fires pollutes the air we breathe. Protect yourself by staying away from smoky areas and getting medical help right away if you have heart, circulatory or breathing problems and feel worse after being near a fire.

#### What is in smoke?

Smoke is a complex mixture of gases and particles. Burning wood, fuel, paper, plastics and other materials creates smoke with a variety of chemicals. Regardless of which specific chemicals are in smoke, it can affect your health.

#### How does breathing in smoke affect health?

Exposure to smoke typically causes eye, nose and throat irritation. In healthy people, these symptoms are usually short-term and unlikely to lead to ongoing health problems.

People with circulatory, heart or breathing problems (like asthma) are more likely to have health issues from smoke exposure. ***If you are in the immediate area of the East Village fire and have shortness of breath, chest pains or a worsening medical condition, such as asthma, seek immediate medical attention.***

#### How can I protect myself from smoke?

Avoid smoky areas. Stay indoors, and, if possible, keep windows closed until the smoke clears. People with heart or breathing problems (like asthma) should avoid breathing smoke as much as possible.

#### Should I see my doctor if I have health effects from smoke?

Common health effects, such as minor eye, nose and throat irritation, do not usually require a visit to your doctor. However, you should seek medical attention right away if you have more serious symptoms, such as shortness of breath or chest pains. Also see your doctor if you have existing asthma, heart disease or another medical condition, and your symptoms are getting worse.

#### How do fires and smoke affect air quality?

Fires temporarily cause higher levels of particles, other air pollutants and strong odors in outdoor air. Depending on the size of the fire, how long it lasted and what was in the structure that burned, smoke and odors may last a few hours or for several days. Any reduction in air quality is usually limited to the immediate area and is short-term.

People living near a fire sometimes request outdoor air quality monitoring. During a fire, visible smoke is

the most important indicator of whether air quality is reduced. Air testing beyond the existing network of air quality monitors provides little information that would inform timely actions or community notices. If a fire occurred in a setting with a large amount of unusual chemical hazards, air monitoring may be helpful.

### **How are communities notified of unhealthy air conditions?**

The Fire Department communicates with people and businesses in the immediate area of a fire when flame, smoke and structural conditions require evacuation from buildings. The City may also issue advisories reminding people to avoid smoke exposure. Depending on the size of the fire and how long it is expected to burn or smoke, these advisories may also suggest that people with respiratory illnesses or who are more sensitive to air pollutants remain indoors and close their windows.

### **What if there is dust, soot and debris from fire damage inside my home?**

Building fires and collapses create soot, dust and debris that can enter nearby buildings and homes. Soot and dust particles can irritate the eyes, nose and throat and worsen conditions like asthma or allergies.

### **How do I get rid of dust, soot and debris?**

If your building has extensive damage and soot/dust, the owner should hire a qualified contractor to repair and clean up damage.

When you move back into your home, take these steps to clean up any minor dust, soot or damage:

- Wear rubber gloves and an N95 disposable dust mask (or similar dust mask). Most home improvement and hardware stores sell N95 dust masks.
- Gently wet down debris and dusty surfaces with water or a soapy water solution in a spray bottle before removing dust/soot.
- Bag debris into regular garbage bags. Tie bags securely when you're done and dispose them along with regular garbage.
- If your home has water damage, remove and throw away any articles that haven't dried out within 48 hours to prevent mold growth.
- If possible, use a vacuum with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter to clean up dust. If you don't have this kind of vacuum, use your regular vacuum.
- Wash your hands and face, especially before eating or drinking. After you finish cleaning, change shoes and clothes before entering clean areas of your home.
- Open windows to air out any remaining smoke odors.
- Things made of porous materials (like fabric-covered furniture) may hold smoke odors and may need to be cleaned to remove odors.

### **How can I remove smoke residue and odors from my home?**

Clean smoke-impacted surfaces as soon as possible. Household items made of porous materials (like fabric-covered furniture) may need to be cleaned to remove odors. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation. If a smoky item cannot be fixed or cleaned, throw it away.

**Can air purifiers reduce smoke residues in my home?**

Air purifiers vary widely in their ability to remove air pollutants. Some may improve indoor air quality after a fire. Always follow the product's instructions when using air purifiers. Keep in mind:

- No air purifier can remove all pollutants from the air.
- The most common air purifiers are made to remove only particles. These purifiers will not affect odors caused by the gases in smoke.
- The use of ultraviolet (UV) light in air purifiers does not remove smoke from the air.
- Some air purifiers release ozone gas, which can irritate lungs and worsen asthma. These air purifiers should **not** be used under any conditions.

**Should I have the air in my home tested for smoke if there is a fire nearby?**

In general, the public health risk for people living or working near a fire is low. As a result, sampling the air in your home is unnecessary. Any contaminants in the air are likely to be present at low levels and for only a short time.

**What if fears about the East Village fire are seriously affecting my family and work life?**

It is not unusual for stressful and tragic events to leave people scared and confused. Stress-related symptoms, such as feeling angry, having headaches or being suspicious and hyper-alert may occur after an event. People who experience these stress-related symptoms for more than a couple of weeks should seek medical help. To find help, visit [800lifenet.org](http://800lifenet.org).

**Where can I get more information?**

- Listen to the radio or look online or on TV for health alerts.
- Follow NYC social channels, including @NYCOEM and @NotifyNYC
- For more information on air purifiers see the EPA report "Residential Air Cleaning Devices: A Summary of Available Information" at [www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/residair.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/residair.html).
- For more information on air quality and health concerns associated with a fire in your neighborhood, call 311.



# Tips on Coping with Disasters and Other Stressful and Traumatic Events



Experiencing traumatic events such as emergencies and disasters can be stressful, even overwhelming. The stress caused by these events can have a negative effect on how you feel, think and act.

*These tips will help you reduce stress and cope better:*

## RECOGNIZE NORMAL STRESS REACTIONS

Most people exposed to stressful and traumatic events will show some signs of distress – but there is no right or wrong way to react. Everyone experiences stress in his or her own way. The following are examples of normal reactions to stressful and traumatic events:

### Physical Reactions

Exhaustion, headaches, dizziness, chills and sweating, chest pains, breathing difficulties, rapid heartbeat, sweating and gastrointestinal problems. Stress can also worsen existing medical conditions.

### Emotional Reactions

Disbelief, shock, fear, anxiety, anger, agitation, irritability, helplessness, loss of interest in activities, guilt and self-doubt, sadness, grief, loneliness and isolation. Some people may experience depression.

### Behavioral Reactions

Not acting “like yourself,” restlessness and argumentativeness, hyperactivity or withdrawal, changes in eating and sleeping habits, crying, emotional outbursts, conflicts at home and/or work, smoking, drugs or alcohol use and/or abuse.

### Cognitive Reactions

Confusion, forgetfulness, difficulties concentrating and making decisions, nightmares and flashbacks.

### Spiritual Reactions

Questioning basic beliefs and values, withdrawal from or sudden turn towards spiritual support.

*After experiencing a stressful or traumatic event:*

*Be patient with yourself and those around you.*

*Give everyone time to cope, adapt and heal.*

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## KNOW THE SIGNS THAT INDICATE YOU MIGHT NEED HELP

Most reactions to stress are transient, and most people will recover with time and support. Stress reactions can appear immediately after the event or may not appear for weeks or even months; memories of previous traumatic experiences may also re-surface. Those directly affected are more likely to have stronger reactions. If the **symptoms persist**, or if they **worsen** or **interfere with daily functioning**, you should consider seeking professional help. If left untreated, these symptoms can affect your health and quality of life for many years.

*If you or anyone you know feels overwhelmed – reach out.*

*Help is available!*

## KNOW WHERE YOU CAN FIND HELP

If you feel overwhelmed or are concerned about yourself or someone else, you can find help by calling **1-800 LIFENET**, a free, confidential helpline for New York City residents, available 24/7, with trained staff ready to take your calls.

1-800-LifeNet  
1-800-543-3638  
(English)

## KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

### Take Care of Your Body

- Get enough sleep.
- Eat regular, healthy meals and remain physically active.
- Avoid drinking alcohol excessively or using drugs or tobacco to help you cope.

1-877-Ayudese  
1-877-298-3373  
(Spanish)

### Take Care of Your Emotional Health

- Do things that help you recharge and feel in control of your life.
- Set realistic goals for the future.
- Focus on your strengths and previous accomplishments.
- Try to remain positive and be patient with yourself.
- Make time to reflect, meditate or pray.
- Save time for the activities you enjoy.

1-877-990-8585  
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- Do not be afraid to express your feelings or to talk about your experiences. You may find that others are experiencing similar things, and you can understand and support each other.
- Do not hesitate to ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or discouraged.
- Stay connected to friends and family.
- Accept support. Know that people care about you.

### Reduce Your Stress

- Try to stick to your daily routine as much as possible. This will give your life structure.
- Do things you find comforting such as reading, listening to music or exercising.
- During a disaster, stay informed by obtaining information from reliable resources, but do not become preoccupied with the news. Watching too much media coverage of the event can be upsetting to you and those others around you, including your children. Do not listen to or act on rumors.

### Manage Your Workload

- Maintain a healthy balance between work and rest.
- Take frequent breaks, and give your body and mind enough time to rest and recharge.
- As you try to cope, do not let work take over your life.
- Remember to make time for your family and friends, as well as your own hobbies and interests.



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