What to do to prevent a mental health crisis

If you live with a mental health condition, a sense of crisis never seems too far removed as your brain can send signals of a crisis state, which can heighten during stressful times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, you have the power to prevent a mental health crisis.

To help you get out in front of such crises, the information provided here refers to those situations where it means getting in trouble with the law or injuring yourself accidentally or on purpose. A crisis can also mean the intention to take your life or to hurt others. Below are some tips provided by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to help you prevent a mental health crisis.

1. **Evaluate the situation.** First and foremost, ask yourself whether you are capable of hurting yourself or others—in the moment—to determine whether your situation is urgent. For example, do you already have a plan on taking your own life, answering the how, when and where? Call a friend or family member if you continue to have such thoughts. Have that person stay with you while feeling at risk. Or call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-8255 to speak with a counselor 24/7. Finally, call your mental health professional to get their advice on your sense of crisis.

2. **Talk with your doctor.** If you feel your health worsening, be sure to call your mental health professional. Speak openly and honestly about what is and isn't working with your treatment plan. If you don't have a mental health professional, call your primary care physician.

3. **Take care of yourself.** Think about what has helped you in the past during times of crisis. Make sure you have a "toolbox" of coping mechanisms, such as talking to a friend, meditating, taking a nap or going for a walk. Take action to help yourself, which can empower you in the moment as well as in the future when you have similar thoughts and feelings.

If you have a long-term treatment plan, you can take comfort in knowing that there are steps to take to ensure that your difficult times become less frequent and less severe. Most importantly, remember that you are not alone, and help is always available.

4. **Avoiding a crisis.** Be sure to have a plan for difficult times. Talk to your treatment team about those actions. If needed, where will you go for intensive treatment and how will you get there? How can you take time off from work and explain your absence to coworkers? What can you do in the moment to calm yourself during an emergency? Finally, be sure you know how to reach your mental health professionals during difficult times.

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness