



# Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
October 2024

## Election Anxiety: How to Cope With Political Stress

By Elizabeth Keohan, LCSW-C, MSW

**The current political landscape in this country can be described in one word — tumultuous. Along with this comes a distinct form of stress that's come to be known as election anxiety. For so many, 2024 election anxiety is impacting friendships, families, and even personal mental well-being. The increasingly intense focus on politics and fear over the future of the United States and the election results directly reflects the heightened polarization we face as a nation today.**

Recent voting cycles highlight the extent of the issue, as we've seen a significant increase in reports of election-related stress and anxiety. An American Psychological Association (APA) survey found that the 2016 presidential election was a source of "significant stress" for more than half (52%) of people surveyed. Almost 4 out of 10 respondents said social media discussions or posts about culture and politics cause them stress.

Where do we go from here? Elections won't — and can't — cease just because they cause stress. We must find a way to manage political anxiety in a healthy, productive way.

Read on to learn what causes anxiety during elections, what signs you should look for, and coping tools you can use or recommend to a loved one struggling.

### Causes of Election Anxiety

All types of anxiety can negatively impact physical and mental well-being, and election stress is no different.

The American Heart Association links anxiety and depression to poor heart health and a higher risk of stroke in multiple studies. Anxiety can make us feel withdrawn, on edge, or hyper-reactive — and it seems the sources are everywhere. We live in a 24-hour news cycle, where clicking the latest headline takes literally no effort. Even if you don't go directly to a news channel, that urge to "connect" can be instantly gratified with a quick doom-scroll session.

The problem with our constant access to information and opinions is that we've created an environment where — especially during election season — we're bombarded with every political move made. Day in and day out, it seems inescapable.

There are several causes of election anxiety. Identifying what triggers your anxiety about politics is the first step in overcoming it.

#### Media overload

A common cause of political anxiety can stem from the relentless inundation of information we encounter every day.

Social media, round-the-clock news and information, and constant updates can quickly become overwhelming, adding to already-frayed nerves. When you add in the high stakes of election season, it becomes even more stressful.

*Continued on the next page.*

 **First Choice Health.**



(800) 777-4114



[www.FirstChoiceEAP.com](http://www.FirstChoiceEAP.com)

Your EAP service is free, confidential and available 24/7 to help you balance your work, family, and personal life.

**Expert Insight:**

*“Media, whether on television or on social media, is designed to grab our attention. It's important to remember that headlines and brief articles are often crafted to do just that—ignite an immediate emotional response. This can leave you feeling isolated and without reassurance. Take things with a grain of salt, especially when trying to absorb eye-catching lines, on the go.”*

- Elizabeth Keohan, LCSW-C, MSW

Media overload can cause exhaustion, a sense of helplessness or hopelessness, frustration, and confusion. For many, it can even cause anger.

**Polarization**

Our society is profoundly polarized today. Where once it was easy to find common middle ground, people were happy to agree to disagree, and differing opinions warranted respect, today, political discourse is more divisive than it is a healthy discussion.

The resulting “us vs. them” mentality can breed fear and exacerbate feelings of anxiety over the outcome of elections in the near future.

Before the 2020 election, the American Psychological Association (APA) found that the presidential election was a significant source of stress for 56% of respondents — up from the 52% who felt this way in the months leading up to the 2016 election. Another shocking reveal from the survey is that election stress is now as central a concern as permanent, more traditional sources, like finances and work.

**Uncertainty or loss of control**

Another reason elections might be causing more anxiety today than in the past is because they feel like they have such high stakes now.

Regardless of which side of the aisle you're on, every election seems to be a pivotal moment. It can feel like the fate of our country hangs in the balance and that we have little to no control over the future. Feelings of uncertainty can be unsettling or stressful, and when fear of the unknown arises, it can force us to come to terms with what an election really means, which can be gravely anxiety-provoking.

**Signs of Election Anxiety**

Recognizing the signs of election anxiety is crucial to understanding and managing it. Once you identify where your stress is coming from, you can address and improve your emotional well-being during political times.

Common signs of election anxiety might include:

- Excessive worrying
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling agitated or on edge
- Doom scrolling endlessly
- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Physical symptoms — stomach issues, headaches, muscle tension
- Change in appetite — binge eating or not eating
- Mood swings
- Unexplained or misdirected anger

**Coping Strategies for Election Anxiety**

Anxiety about politics can significantly impact your well-being and it can be difficult to get away from what triggers your anxiety. You can't stop the election from happening, after all. You can't do much more than vote, spread awareness, or volunteer (all of which take time, energy, and effort). It's easy to feel like you have little to no control over the election results.

If you know specifically what's causing your election anxiety, though, there are steps you can take to manage the impact in healthy ways.

**Limit media consumption**

This one might take a little more dedication. It's just so easy to grab the phone and start scrolling the news or social media — but limiting how much you actively engage in media consumption can effectively reduce election anxiety.

Checking your phone usage can be eye-opening, and the results might shock you. Discovering how much time you lose every day to media consumption might help you slow down a bit.

*Continued on the next page.*

If you struggle to limit your interaction with media, you can:

- Set limits on how long you allow yourself to check various media sources.
- Create specific times during your days when you catch up on the news or use social media.
- Physically block your access to certain apps on your smartphone with the time limit feature to reduce access to media.

## Engage in positive activities

Wondering how to reduce anxiety immediately? According to some research, the power of positive thinking is proven to reduce worrisome thought processes, even for those living with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) — but just telling people to “think positive” is much easier said than done. What is easier, though, is getting involved in things, activities, and social settings that make you happy.

The brain responds positively when we do things that reward and fulfill us or make us happy. One (albeit small) study even found that people who received Botox that limited their ability to frown experienced a more positive mood simply from smiling more. Smiling might trick the brain into happiness, but other ways exist to get involved and reduce your election anxiety.

Volunteer for a cause you’re passionate about. Studies show that people who consistently volunteer see many positive physical, mental, and social health benefits. They’re more satisfied and have less stress and anxiety in their lives. They also often experience increased functioning and a sense of pride and empowerment — all things that can be significantly impacted when struggling with the magnitude of election anxiety.

Other ideas include:

- Get outdoors — hike, walk, bike ride, or garden.
- Connect with friends or family (who share or respect your views).
- Be creative — paint, draw, bake, write.
- Use relaxation techniques like meditation.
- Listen to music or audiobooks.

## Stay informed in healthy ways

Being informed on critical political and global issues is essential, and yes, doing so during the upcoming

election season seems reasonable and necessary. That said, if you know you’re the type who goes down rabbit holes, learning to limit how much you allow yourself to engage in is vital.

There are several healthy ways to stay informed about issues you care about without overdoing it.

- Give yourself daily time limits on where and how long you search for information.
- Diversify your news sources.
- Take breaks where you don’t engage or respond.
- Actively practice critical thinking by fact-checking sources to avoid misinformation.
- Only engage in constructive, healthy, and respectful discussions.
- Practice disengaging so you can do so when needed in a non-confrontational way.
- Balance the information you seek with active actions that have a positive impact (volunteering, becoming an advocate, participating in civic engagement).
- Practice self-care.
- Seek support or professional help if you feel that you need it.

## Focus on what you can control

Election outcomes aren’t something you can control, and that reality alone can make some people feel helpless and anxious. Focusing on what you can control is a great way to give yourself an outlet and let go of the anxiety cycle you are in.

### Expert Insight:

*“Election anxiety isn’t new. While we invest a lot of time and worry into a potential outcome it’s important to remember we cannot control what happens. A small step towards managing the unknowns is to pause to reflect and focus on the things that are stable and in place in your life regardless of results.”*

- Elizabeth Keohan, LCSW-C, MSW

If you feel hopeless about politics, focus more energy on things you can control. Numerous bodies of research have linked maintaining a sense of control to general well-being. Interestingly, even just perceived control might positively impact mood and health. There are several easy, effective ways to gain a sense of control when dealing with political anxiety.

*Continued on the next page.*

First, you want to identify actionable steps — educating yourself on issues you care about, volunteering, and voting are no-brainers.

You can also:

- Set realistic expectations about what impact your efforts will have.
- Advocate for causes you're impassioned by.
- Volunteer for campaigns or things that are important to you.
- Channel your frustration and energy into productive activities, like community service, hobbies you're passionate about, or projects you've wanted to tackle.
- Focus on local initiatives where you can see tangible and more immediate results.
- Practice gratitude by keeping a gratitude journal — research suggests that grateful people are happier, healthier, and less anxious.

### Mindfulness and relaxation techniques

Practicing mindfulness — the art of being in the present — is an excellent way to train the brain to be in the now instead of worrying about the future. Relaxation techniques are also effective in reducing anxiety and promoting a sense of calm and peace in your life.

While it can take some time to “get good” at mindfulness, it's proven effective in managing anxiety and depression. Positive ways to become more mindful using relaxation coping techniques include:

- Meditating
- Yoga
- Journaling for anxiety
- Deep breathing exercises for anxiety
- Walking

### Seek professional help

Although there are dozens of ways to manage election anxiety on your own, sometimes you might need to seek additional help with therapy for anxiety. Mental health professionals can help you identify the source of your anxiety and teach you how to manage the election-related stress you're dealing with. They'll also offer practical coping tools to use outside of therapy.

Professional help might include:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Learning self-help tactics
- Promoting self-care
- Anxiety medication

### Get Online Support for Anxiety

Struggling with election anxiety can become all-consuming and exhausting. It can tax your mental and physical health and impact relationships with friends, family, spouses, and co-workers. Fortunately, you don't have to go through this alone. Online support through a platform like Talkspace makes getting help easy. Talkspace is affordable and convenient, so you can get the help you need for your 2024 election anxiety in a safe place from the comfort of your home.

Reach out to Talkspace today to learn how easy it is to work with one of our licensed mental health professionals so you can overcome election anxiety or anything else you need help with in life.



You may access your free EAP sessions through Talkspace by going to <https://www.talkspace.com/firstchoicehealthep>.

#### References:

<https://www.talkspace.com/mental-health/conditions/articles/election-anxiety/>