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## STATE HEALTH AND DISASTER OFFICIALS PROVIDE IMPORTANT TIPS TO HELP FLORIDIANS COPE WITH STRESS AFTER THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE

*~Useful information from the Department of Health and the American Red Cross~*

**TALLAHASSEE-** - As Floridians watch the events unfold in Haiti, officials from the Florida Department of Health and American Red Cross want to remind residents that reactions to a traumatic event are quite common among all people. Some reactions will be mild while others may be so strong that they might cause difficulty in functioning.

"Our hearts and prayers go out to the people of Haiti in this time of crisis," said State Surgeon General Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H. "It is important for all of us to monitor our health and the health of our loved ones for signs of mental stress and the physical reactions that the stress can bring."

Below are some signs and symptoms which are quite common and normal, followed by some tips and suggestions about what to do to help yourself and others around you get back on your normal path of life.

*Physical reactions:* Chills, sweating, stomach upset, headaches, rapid heartbeat, vomiting, dizziness, chest pain, heavy breathing, difficulty catching your breath, shaking, muscle tension and aches, or anything that is not part of your normal physical being.

*Thinking reactions:* Confusion, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, heightened startle response, blaming, disorientation, trouble making decisions, problems with numbers, nightmares, flashbacks, or any thinking difficulty or change from your normal thinking process.

*Emotional reactions:* Fear, anger, guilt, panic, anxiety, aggression, crying spells, irritability, feeling overwhelmed or out of control, denial, depression, or any emotion which is not common for you.

*Behavioral reactions:* Withdrawal, restlessness, changes in sleep, changes in appetite, increased use of alcohol, increased use of other substances, angry outbursts, difficulty expressing yourself, frustration, or any behavior which is different than your normal way of behaving.

### ***The Florida Department of Health offers the following tips to help during this time:***

- Avoid sugar, coffee, fried foods, alcohol and drink more water.
- Talk about your feelings, thoughts, and frustrations with others.
- Develop and try to keep a routine.
- Avoid over use of medications, drugs, cigarettes etc.
- Don't make any major decisions or changes. Give yourself time to mend.
- Eat lighter, healthier meals and eat smaller portions but more often than normal.
- Realize that you are not alone. Others are going through similar issues with you.
- Rest, even if you can't sleep.

The American Red Cross has also produced informational brochures with tips on taking care of your emotional help after a disaster. Officials note that each positive action you take can help you feel better and more in control. The brochures in English and Creole are attached. For more information on disaster and emergency preparedness visit, [www.RedCross.org](http://www.RedCross.org).

For more information on the Florida Department Health please go to [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us). To learn more about the Florida Division of Emergency Management and to GET A PLAN!, please visit: [www.FloridaDisaster.org](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org). All students, teachers and parents can find educational information and free downloadable materials at: [www.KidsGetAPlan.com](http://www.KidsGetAPlan.com). And for the latest situation and flash reports go to: [www.YouTube.com/FloridaSERT](http://www.YouTube.com/FloridaSERT).

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