

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

HOARDING: WHAT AND WHY

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Perhaps you have seen empty grocery store shelves where there is little to no toilet paper, meat cases are bare, and cleaning product aisles have been abandoned.

Hoarding, or the compulsive purchasing of consumer goods, is revealing itself in stores across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. But, why is this happening, and how can consumers resist the urge to hoard?

This publication will help answer some of these questions.



What is hoarding?

According to researchers, hoarding is a form of compulsive shopping behavior, where consumers lack control over buying decisions. The notion of hoarding describes behavioral characteristics, where individuals acquire an excessive collection of products and fail to discard or use those products. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, hoarding products is associated with panic buying, where shoppers irrationally buy large amounts of goods to avoid future shortages.

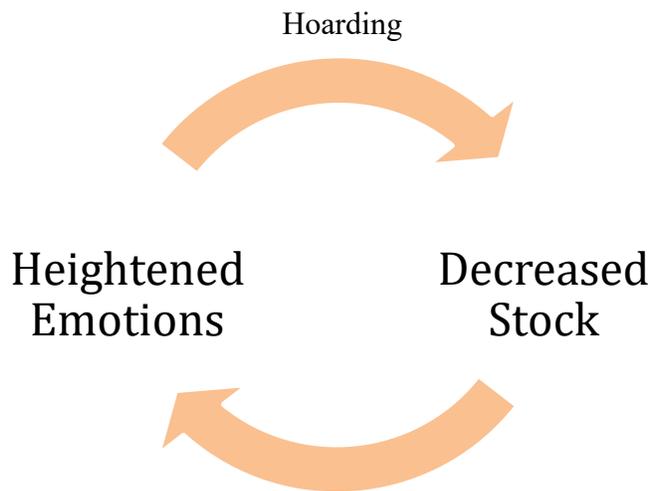
Why are people hoarding?

There are many reasons why consumers hoard. Outlined below are three reasons cited in the research.

Control

In times of crisis and uncertainty, individuals often hoard items as a way to gain a sense of control. As uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic builds, shoppers seek to gain control over the uncontrollable through panic buying and compulsively hoarding large quantities of certain essential items such as toilet paper, soap and hand sanitizer for future use. While it is true that purchasers are spending more time at home and thus using more of some products, the

current consumption levels of certain products (for example, toilet paper) tend to be in excess of what would be expected or needed.



Emotions

During times of crisis and uncertainty, it is easy for emotions to take control of shopping decisions. In some cases, these emotional reactions can lead to hoarding certain items. Empty grocery store shelves further feed and reinforce the desire to buy more than is needed, thus creating a cycle.

Fear and Panic

Finally, research shows that hoarding also can be fed by fear and consumer panic about the future availability of certain products. The fear that there will be a future shortage drives consumers to panic, leading to stockpiles of products when they become available.

What can you do to resist the urge to hoard?

In order to ensure plenty of items are available to others in our community, it is important to purchase only what is actually needed. By avoiding hoarding behavior, shoppers will not overburden the supply chain of goods, thus enabling others to meet their household needs. Remember, we are all in this together.

To avoid the urge to hoard, researchers suggest that you:

- **Gain Control.** Hoarding behavior in times of crisis often represents an effort to gain control. During this time of stress, it is important that you gain control of your life by maintaining regular routines, staying healthy, and getting plenty of sleep and exercise. These activities will help you better resist the urge to shop compulsively.
- **Take Stock.** Before going shopping, take stock of what you have on hand. In doing so, you will be less likely to impulsively purchase items that you do not actually need. This is not the time to shop without a plan and list.
- **Recognize Your Emotions.** Shopping for household goods is often a mindless task. After all, you have shopped for these items all your life. However, now more than ever, it is important that you are aware of your buying behavior and decisions. When consumers are faced with an empty shelf of toilet paper, for example, it is important that they not let their emotions take charge. Reacting emotionally to the sight of barren shelves can lead to uninformed and sometimes irrational shopping decisions and panic buying. It is important

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for you to remind yourself when you do see empty shelves, that the current supply chain of goods is working and more stock will be on the shelves soon.

Some retailers are limiting quantities consumers can purchase. While this may cause anxiety and panic, it is important to realize that retailers are simply trying to help ensure ample supply for everyone.

- **Reach out.** The current COVID-19 pandemic is stressful and can be a source of anxiety. If you find that you are unable to manage the stress and anxiety caused by the current situation, you should not feel ashamed or embarrassed to reach out for help. Addressing the underlying causes of stress, fear and anxiety are essential to dealing with hoarding behavior.

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