



## **COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:**

### **ANXIETY MANAGEMENT**

**Version 3, 4/20/20**

Many people experience an increase in fear, worry, and many other strong emotions during a crisis like the one caused by COVID-19. In addition to these emotional responses, stress can also cause or exacerbate other symptoms, including:

- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Tension in your body, and sometimes increased pain such as headache
- Sensations of heart racing or difficulty breathing
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering

It is also well-known that when we think about a symptom (“Did I just cough? Do I have a cough? Is my throat sore?”), our mind may jump to the conclusion that we are ill.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, people have reality-based anxieties about their health and well-being and the health and well-being of those they love and know. Such anxieties are normal and the ability to feel anxiety can help you face and adapt to the challenges associated with the pandemic. However, intensely high levels of anxiety or anxiety that you feel all the time can be counterproductive and make it challenging for you to function. It is important to proactively take care of your mental health to control your stress levels and your anxiety. To manage your anxiety and function the best that you can, here are some tips. Helpful resources also are included.

### **Make Time for Stress Management and Relaxation**

- Develop a regular self-care practice that consists of multiple forms of self-care including, but not limited to:
  - Exercise
  - Use of deep breathing (12 count breath cycles: 6 counts in, 6 counts out; 4 counts in, 4 counts hold, 4 counts out)
  - Meditation
  - Online yoga classes
  - App-based meditation (e.g., Calm or Headspace)
  - Journaling



- Prayer
- Other forms of self-care
- Practice mindfulness
  - Stay in the present moment
  - Maintain a nonjudgmental awareness of your thoughts, feelings and experiences
  - Engage in mindfulness activities (e.g., mindful breathing, mindful listening, mindful coloring, mindful eating)

### **Take One Moment at a Time**

- Notice that future-thinking rapidly becomes stressful and overwhelming
- Tackle one challenge at a time
- Bring your attention back to the present moment when you notice your mind wanting to think about the future
  - Notice the worry, acknowledge it, and then focus on what it is you're doing
- Focus on what is happening locally (rather than globally) and steps you can take to keep yourself, your family, and your neighbors safe and healthy

### **Be Thoughtful and Mindful about the News so it Doesn't Overwhelm You**

- Get the facts from trusted and scientifically based organizations including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and local and leading academic institutions (e.g., <https://www.emory.edu/coronavirus/> )
- Remind yourself of the facts
- Set limits for yourself to avoid information overload
  - Pick a few designated times a day that you will check the news, social media, etc. and then stick to them
  - Take breaks from coverage in between

### **Remind Yourself You are Not Alone**

- Acknowledge that while uncertainty is uncomfortable right now, it is normal
- Remember, anxiety is not right or wrong, it is just part of the human experience
- Give yourself permission to feel the way that you do, with the understanding that your anxiety may not immediately go away as the situation continues to unfold



## **Reach Out for Support and Connection**

- Reach out to friends, family, your therapist, or a support group
- Connect using phone calls, texting, video calls, and smart phone apps
- Choose to talk about the situation or simply connect about other things
- Reach out to your support system if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is impacting your capacity to care for yourself or others as you did before the pandemic

## **Connect with Your Values**

- Remind yourself what is most meaningful and important to you
- Identify ways of engaging daily with these values
  - Pursue an interest or support someone else, even when you feel anxious
- Do what matters to you
- Fight helplessness and anxiety by finding purpose in your life
- Combat urges to avoid important tasks, which doesn't leave you feeling fulfilled in the long-run and often causes increased anxiety. On the other end, burnout is real so be mindful of your limits to prevent exhaustion
  - Come up with a reasonable schedule you feel comfortable and do your best to stick to that
  - Remove pressure to perform at your peak and remind yourself that you are doing the best that you can

## **Seek Professional Assistance if Needed**

- Recognize if your anxiety/panic is controlling you
- Seek a consultation for psychotherapy or medication
- Follow-up with recommendations made during the consultation

## **Helpful Resources**

- Center for Disease Control (CDC) Coping Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- General Recommendations: <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-cope-with-coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-psychologist-2020-2>
- International OCD Foundation (IOCDF) Resources and Recommendations: <https://iocdf.org/covid19/>
- Additional resources for managing stress, anxiety, or OCD:
  - [https://www.allencomm.com/courses/covid19\\_5\\_tips\\_to\\_face\\_your\\_anxiety/](https://www.allencomm.com/courses/covid19_5_tips_to_face_your_anxiety/)



- [index.html](#)
- <https://thewellnesssociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Coronavirus-Anxiety-Workbook.pdf>
  - [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/k7exqm/how-to-deal-with-coronavirus-if-you-have-ocd-or-anxiety?utm\\_campaign=sharebutton](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/k7exqm/how-to-deal-with-coronavirus-if-you-have-ocd-or-anxiety?utm_campaign=sharebutton)
  - <https://www.shalanicely.com/aha-moments/managing-ocd-about-coronavirus/>
  - <https://elemental.medium.com/if-youre-feeling-overwhelmed-here-s-a-science-backed-way-to-take-control-a9650718365c>
  - [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/22/think-about-the-best-case-scenario-how-to-manage-coronavirus-anxiety?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/22/think-about-the-best-case-scenario-how-to-manage-coronavirus-anxiety?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)
  - <https://newpaltz.edu/media/idmh/covid-19/IDMH%20COVID19%20Community%20Stress%20Management%20Tip%20Sheet%202020%20Final.pdf>
  - Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) Coping Resources:
    - <https://adaa.org/sites/default/files/National%20Center%20for%20PTSD%20COVID19%20Managing%20Stress%2003062020.pdf>
    - <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/panic-sells-calm-saves>
  - World Health Organization (WHO) Coping Resource: <https://adaa.org/sites/default/files/WHO%20Coping%20with%20Coronavirus%20Stress%20PDF.pdf>
  - University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Self Help Brochures: <http://counseling-center.illinois.edu/node/376>
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA): <https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus>
  - Psychology Tools: <https://www.psychologytools.com/psychological-resources-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>
  - Understanding and Managing Emotions Elicited by the COVID-19 Pandemic: <http://www.unifiedprotocol.com/SiteData/docs/HandoutEmo/5e787c9e1a972cac/Handout%20-%20Emotions%20&%20COVID-19.pdf>