

Coping with Anxiety during COVID-19

All of us want to be in control of our fear and cope with the stress of this pandemic in a healthy way. Here are four things you can do.

It is important to understand why we feel panicked.

Anxiety is our body's natural response to stress and acts as a built-in safety mechanism that prevents you from harm. When that mechanism is working well, it correctly assesses danger and offers us a safety response, kind of like a smoke alarm sounding when there is an actual fire. When we hear the alarm, it triggers us to quickly change our behaviour to stay safe.

For many of us, our internal safety mechanism — a metaphorical smoke alarm — can be overly-sensitive or even faulty from time to time resulting in an inability to correctly assess the situational risk and properly determine the level of threat. Think of it as a defective smoke detector that signals an alarm at the right, and wrong, times. Fire or not, whenever we hear that alarm, we naturally respond with stress.

When it comes to anxiety around COVID-19, for some of us, a similar stress response may be happening. While we are rationally aware that we may not be at significant risk, we may feel that we are not in control and therefore our internal panic button or alarm is triggered resulting in physical and emotional distress.

What can be helpful?

Each of us can take small steps that, taken together, can make a big impact on managing our anxiety.

- **Regular hand washing.** Wash those hands! Experts recommend at least 20 seconds of vigorous handwashing with soap and warm water.
- **Reading trusted news articles.** Being careful to verify the source of the information. For the most trustworthy information, refer to the [World Health Organization](#).
- **Focus on self-care and coping strategies.** Self-care is health care and it is important to continue the routines that have consistently helped you to remain healthy.
- **Prayer.** It is important for us to anchor our hearts in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. With the worldwide outbreak of the COVID-19, we are confronted once more with the fragility of our lives, and again we are reminded of our common humanity — that the peoples of this world are our brothers and sisters, that we are all one family under God. We pray for God's healing mercy and that He will graciously bring this pandemic to an end. Pray for healing for all those affected by the virus.

- **Discussing fears with loved ones.** Sharing your fears and concerns with trusted loved ones can help to alleviate symptoms of stress and anxiety. As humans, we are wired for connection and sharing our stories and experiences helps us to make sense of them. Friends and loved ones may give us perspective that we do not necessarily consider ourselves and may help us problem-solve around how to cope with our stress.
- **Checking in with your loved ones that are at higher risk (elderly and/or those with chronic medical conditions).** We know that some populations are at higher risk than others are. Checking in with them regularly can help them, and you feel more in control.
- **Practice social distancing.** This buzz term simply means keeping people apart from each other, at least 6 feet apart, and avoiding direct human contact with others. The best way to prevent “community spread” is to spread out the community. That means keeping people apart. Each individual is responsible to take precautions that prevent the spread of the virus, not only for themselves but also to protect those who are at higher risk.
- **If you are sick, stay home.** Whether you are showing [the symptoms of COVID-19](#) or not, adjust your commitments to avoid having to be in close proximity to others.
- **Get tested if you are showing symptoms.** If you are showing symptoms of COVID-19, it is essential that you get tested. Rather than showing up unannounced at a clinic or hospital, it is best to call your healthcare provider or [public health authority](#) and they will be able to guide you on the appropriate location to go to.

What might be unhelpful?

There are actions that will likely add to your anxiety.

- **It is difficult to understand how to not over or under-react.** Often in an effort to keep us safe, our mind falls into a pattern of [catastrophic thinking](#). It can be helpful to separate between what is necessarily going to happen from what is possible to happen. It may be possible, but is it certain? Similarly, it can be useful to not make assumptions or get ahead of yourself, instead of making choices one-step at a time.
- **Overindulging in media consumption.** Take a break from social media and news consumption if you feel that you are becoming increasingly worried or anxious. Notice what happens in your body and mind while on the break. If you feel calmer and less overwhelmed it’s a good reminder to take regular planned social media and news consumption breaks throughout your day.
- **Ignoring your needs.** When you are feeling particularly anxious, it is essential to pay attention to what you can control. It is okay to prioritize your needs during this time. We expect to see grieving during this time, as

people end up having to cancel time with friends and family or major life events due to precautionary measures to control the spread of the virus.

- **Ignoring your coping strategies and self-care.** Self-care is critical, particularly during times of social isolation. You may need to modify self-care routines to support recommended infection-control practices.
- **Identify your drive to panic buy and where it comes from.** See this article by Sander Van der Linden from Cambridge University- [This article by CNBC](#) .

If you feel that you are overwhelmed, please reach out to someone for support.

There is no shame in sharing your feelings, fears and challenges. We are literally all in this together.

- **If you are in crisis and in need of support, calling a crisis line can help.** Contrary to popular beliefs about crisis lines, they exist to provide support for a wide range of distress. If you are in immediate crisis, call COAST at 905-972-8338, your Family Physician or attend St. Joseph's Healthcare Charlton Site – Emergency Psychiatric Services. You can also Call 1-833-456-4566, text 45645 or click www.crisisservicescanada.ca
- **If you are concerned you may have COVID-19, seek medical attention.** See [Government of Canada and Public Health](#) or call your healthcare provider or [public health authority](#).
- **If you are anxious about this pandemic and its impact on your mental health speak to someone. Consider reaching out to EAP at extension 2981.**