

COPING WITH ANXIETY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

These are certainly challenging times. Most of us are experiencing unexpected changes in the way we live and the way we work; we are having to adapt very quickly. Let's look at some tips to deal with the anxiety we may be feeling about it all...



- **Perspective and proportionality:** In some ways, today is just the same as yesterday. Certainly, in the news we are hearing about unprecedented change but, on a simple level, you got up this morning, had breakfast, breathed the air – just like yesterday. Remember that our thoughts are just thoughts, they are not necessarily reality.
- **Try not to dwell:** It's OK to accept that you have worries, acknowledge and talk about them, but try not to dwell. This too will pass. There is a future. You can do this!
- **Paying attention to what you have control over is important:** There are many things we cannot control about this situation and not knowing how long it will last can feel unnerving. However, we **can** control some pieces of the day. It's important to focus on these things rather than the things you cannot control. You can still maintain personal hygiene, social distancing and, for most, go out for essential shopping. If you're worried about something, you might ask yourself if you can do anything about it. If you can't, try to let those worries dissipate as much as possible, through breathing and calming thoughts.
- **Try breathing exercises:** breathe in for a count of three, then breathe out for a count of six. Taking just three or so breaths like this can really help lower your physiological response. Any time you are aware of feeling anxious during the day, you can take a few breaths like this to calm your nervous system. And speaking of exercise, **try to get some as often as you can** - it really plays a positive role in helping to reduce depression/anxiety.



- **Be mindful:** Right now, everything is fine. You're doing what you can. You, like everyone else, has to cope with what is happening and you can make it through this difficult time. Try some mindfulness to help keep you in the moment.
www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/
- **Try to establish and maintain a regular routine:** While sticking to government advice, you can still maintain the important aspects of your life – such as meal times, work hours, etc – even in this abnormal situation. Keep a balance of personal (relaxation) and family life (the needs of others), professional (maintaining purpose) and social (connectedness).
- It's also important to **limit the time spent listening to news about the virus.** While keeping up to date is useful, don't keep the TV on all the time listening to the news/reading articles online. For most of us, this only creates a feeling of overload and stress. However, staying digitally connected with others means you can reach out for reassurance, so pick and choose what you do.

- **Take some time for you:** Particularly if you have family/pets around you and are working from home, this can seem an impossible task and worries can build and build. Everyone has arguments and being stuck together like this can sometimes be a problem. Get out that bubble bath, go for a walk if you can or connect with friends on social media.
- **Take some time for others:** If you live alone (or with family/friends), consider those less fortunate. Ring an elderly relative or neighbour. If you are not self-isolating perhaps you can pick up a bit of shopping for them and put it by their door.
- **Gratitude:** Some people find a gratitude journal, listing three things you are grateful for each day, is helpful. It can be a really good emotional leveller.
- Even if your work hasn't slowed down, you may have **more free time** in the evening. Do anything that helps you relax, such as catching up with your favourite TV shows, reading more or taking the opportunity for walks. It may also be a good time to try something new. There are amazing YouTube videos for learning all kinds of things from home and now you may have more time to pursue these. And perhaps the family can join in!
- **Try meditation:** The Headspace www.headspace.com App has some brilliant exercises, teaching you life-changing skills of meditation and mindfulness in just a few minutes a day.
- **Keep to a healthy, balanced diet** (get your five a day) and take time to carefully plan, cook and enjoy meals. However, minimise your alcohol intake: it might make you feel better initially, but drinking can lead to feelings of increased anxiety and depression.
- Make sure you get some **sleep**. It's very important to maintain a regular sleep routine and good sleep hygiene. The quality and quantity of your sleep impacts your mental resilience and immune function. Read our article www.duradiamondhealth.com/2020/03/13/better-sleep-better-life-better-planet/
- **If you are still feeling very anxious**, call your EAP if you have one. Also, you can contact the Samaritans www.samaritans.org, NHS 111, or telephone your doctor's surgery. There's lots of help online too.

Useful sites for a range of issues:

- www.anxietyuk.org.uk/
- www.mind.org.uk/
- www.thebraincharity.org.uk/
- www.sane.org.uk/home
- www.lgbt.foundation/helpline
- www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/
- www.ukna.org/
- www.womensaid.org.uk/
- www.mensadvice.org.uk/
- www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus

AND FINALLY...

Just remember, right now, right here, you're OK.

Sources:

<https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/17/tips-coping-anxiety-face-covid-19/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-right-mindset/202003/mindfulness-practices-lower-anxiety>

<https://psyhealth.co.uk/>

