

Ten tips to manage anxiety around the coronavirus

This sheet is designed to help individuals deal with their internal feelings of increased anxiety. We are facing an extraordinary global situation currently, with an increase in cases of coronavirus – therefore it is understandable that your levels of anxiety, and the types of anxiety you may be experiencing, may have increased.

1. **Don't get angry with yourself for being anxious.** Accept your feelings and be as kind and compassionate towards yourself as is possible. Your anxieties are understandable, as this is an unusual situation. If you think about what anxiety is, it is an increased level of fear. We are therefore not looking to eradicate the fear – because that would lead to recklessness – merely reduce to an emotionally manageable level ones feelings of fear.
2. **Only listen to trusted, official sources of information.** At the moment, every news item is exploring a wide ranging selection of viewpoints and speculations. Speculations are mimicking the 'problem solving' part of your mind that reaches out to find solutions. However, this is bigger than something you can achieve by your own personal actions. Therefore limiting information to that which is focused and relevant will prove more helpful.
3. **Selective use of social media.** There are obviously positive benefits to the use of social media currently. In particular, it helps to keep us socially connected. However it can also be an unhelpful rumour-mill. If you find you are accessing social media for long periods of time and that your excessive watching of coronavirus coverage is exacerbating levels of anxiety – you may want to limit your useage and give yourself a time limit. Say one hour a day.
4. **Dealing with uncertainty.** To want to control circumstances or those around you, is natural when you're suffering from anxiety. Currently there is a lot of uncertainty, and you maybe hearing stories about other people's difficult decisions or uncertain circumstances. Accepting that we don't have control may feel hard. Bring your awareness to your thoughts when you're feeling anxious and ask yourself what it is that you're uncertain of. Accept your feelings around not being in control of something. Be kind to yourself through this process because it's not easy. Yet try and practicing gently dropping those thoughts that cause the most anxiety. You are not your thoughts.
5. **Getting mindful.** When our minds are constantly throwing themselves forward to try and read an unknown future – try and pull your thoughts back to the moment. You might want to try the 'five senses' exercise. Using as many as your senses as is possible, ask yourself in the present moment, what am I seeing, what can I hear, what am I touching. Try to engage with those senses as much as possible. You'll find you can't be present and yet thinking at the same time. When you're really present, thoughts tend to slip away.
6. **Mindful activities.** If it feels challenging to 'let thoughts go', another technique is to become fully engaged with the task you're doing at the time you're doing it. It doesn't have to be an exceptional task – whether you're hoovering or washing up - really look, really become engaged in what you're doing. Be aware of when you're on 'automatic pilot' and thinking – and pull yourself back into your body and your senses. Getting fresh air and exercise like walking is obviously good and at the time of writing this is still possible.
7. **Dealing with change.** It maybe that your normal habits have been disrupted. Sometimes we may not even been aware of how this is affecting us and

surprise ourselves by becoming irritable or tearful. At these moments, simply stop and take a moment. Understand the difficulty around changing habits. Give yourself the time it takes to slowly address new habits. Maybe it won't all happen at once, but maybe that's ok. Focus instead on those small points that haven't changed and enjoy them. The cup of tea. Your pet. When you feel calmer you could even jot down your thoughts to what alternatives there are to your usual habits (eg. A virtual workout, or a walk, rather than a visit to the gym.) Take your time. This can feel challenging.

8. **'Chimp' feelings versus logical understandings.** Just because you feel you will run out of food – doesn't mean you will. Just because you feel your loved one is in imminent danger – doesn't mean they are. If you are being sensible and taking sensible precautions, statistically you will be absolutely fine. Everybody knows some current provision shortages have been caused by panic buying. Yet there is enough supplies. Seeing somebody wearing a face mask may prompt panicked feelings, although logically these measures are more likely to be ones chimp brain. Therefore you might want to slow down, take some time to rationalise your thinking and remind yourself that daydreams or imaginings are just your minds way of stretching itself across all possibilities. Bring your awareness to whether your feelings reflect the most logical outcomes. If this doesn't work for you – then go back to points 5 and 6.
9. **Slow down.** There is a physical aspect to anxiety, as our system produces more adrenal to prepare for flight-or-flight. So when you purposefully slow down, you're sending messages to your brain, that there is no immediate danger. Sometimes when you're anxious you find you can't concentrate – so it makes sense to slow down. You'll be more productive not less. In the current situation, you may be asked to learn something eg a technical ability, but take your time. Think about the process not the arrival.
10. **Help somebody else.** Think about those around you – or what it is that you could do to help somebody or something else. When we extend ourselves outwards – eg calling somebody who is socially isolated, or dropping shopping off, it helps us lose focus on our own thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the 'role' we play changes. When we 'help' it can make us feel stronger, which may naturally divert you away from your own anxieties.

These tips are designed to support you in managing your feelings of anxiety in the present situation. Anxiety and low mood can feel quite linked and therefore you may also be experiencing feelings of sadness and tearfulness. There are some lovely 20 minute guided meditations on Youtube to help with relaxation and temporarily invite a different mood and more positive messages.

However, if you feel you need further support in trying to implement strategies around your personal circumstances and worries, you can always set up a telephone or skype call with me (details below).

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