

Tip Sheet for Managing Coronavirus Concerns for People Who Have Anxiety

News

It's tempting to check news constantly to see how the situation is developing. To combat compulsive checking, restrict your news intake to a frequency and duration that works for you. For instance, you might only check once a day for a maximum of 10 minutes, or twice a day for a maximum of 5 minutes, etc.. Set a timer so you don't overstep the bounds. Constant compulsive checking is only going to worsen your anxiety. You might watch the evening news, or you might decide not to check news at all, or you might decide to get your updates from a calm and trusted friend. Do whatever is most useful for you (and not for the anxiety).

Contamination and Preparedness

Because of the present situation, give yourself permission to follow current guidelines being recommended by authorities such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC and the WHO have the knowledge to be making these recommendations. Excessive anxiety, no matter what it says, does not. Your goal is to restrict yourself to following valid recommendations. For instance, you could wash your hands as directed by the CDC/WHO but no more than that. Anxiety isn't going to like this, which is good. Remember that the more you feed anxiety, the stronger it gets. Anxiety makes a good servant (for example, helping you keep aware of the need to follow guidelines), but a terrible master (dictating that you have to go way above and beyond the guidelines).

Similarly, when it comes to stocking up on pantry items or household necessities, follow CDC or WHO guidelines. There will never be enough items in your house if anxiety is calling the shots. So, come up with an authoritative list, and locate those items or substitutes if possible. Once you have those, tell the anxiety it is not allowed to make you run all over town buying up the last available items just because you're anxious.

Dealing with rumors

Recognize that during these kinds of events, rumors tend to run rampant. They tend to increase everyone's anxiety, without being useful to anyone. It takes a lot of discipline, but when you hear rumors about what is happening, try to take a deep breath and tell yourself (and the person passing it on) to hold off on spreading that around.

Self-compassion

Recognize that if you're anxious about coronavirus, that's normal and you're not alone. The situation is making many people fearful, even people who don't have excessive anxiety. Allow yourself to feel anxious and realize that your anxiety might not go away while the situation is still unfolding. It's hard to tolerate this uncertainty, but this is the central challenge of getting through this kind of event.

Be compassionate with yourself if you're experiencing an increase in anxiety symptoms. It's not your fault! Do what you can to keep your anxiety in check without trying to be

perfect. If you need support, schedule a booster session with your therapist, if you have one, or reach out to a support group like Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA). During this difficult time, more therapists have been freed up by insurance companies and regulatory agencies to provide telemental health services, which may make it more possible for you to access care.

You are not alone

You are in this community with a lot of talented and caring people. We are working together to create solutions and do the best we can in this situation. There's a lot we can't control, but we're working together, and we'll figure things out as we go. It's OK not to know what comes next. Reach out (by phone or in a safe way) to friends, clergy, and other people who are supportive and calm. They will help you get through this, and you will help them.

Other resources

A professional psychologist or counselor who provides Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an extremely valuable ally in learning how to reduce anxiety.

Mobile apps and support groups can be useful in giving you information about how to decrease overall anxiety and “surf the wave” of anxiety without drowning in it.

Some useful apps are listed below. Most are free, and some are currently offering free subscriptions to healthcare providers:

- LifeMatters is available to all BonSecours Mercy employees and affiliated physicians.
- MindShift CBT
- UCLA Mindful
- *Centre for Clinical Interventions* online workbooks (their workbooks on panic and health anxiety and self-compassion are particularly valuable right now)
- Calm
- Breathe
- Breath Ball
- 7 Cups
- Mindtools
- BoosterBuddy
- Sleepbot
- What's Up?
- HeadSpace

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This tip sheet is not a substitute for professional medical or psychological care