

10 Ways to Manage Anxiety About the Coronavirus

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For many of us, the rapidly evolving coronavirus (also called COVID-19) outbreak has created a surge in fear and worry. In this time of heightened stress and anxiety, here are ten ways to stay healthy.

1. Stay Informed, But Watch COVID-19 News in Small Doses

The news headlines are dominated by the coronavirus virus. While keeping up with key developments can help manage worries about the uncertainty of the outbreak, staying tuned into the news 24/7 can actually make anxiety worse.

“Don’t be afraid to limit the time you listen to news about the coronavirus virus,” says Adrienne D. Taylor, MD, a psychiatrist at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. “Take breaks. Try to focus on the positives in your life. Participate in healthy activities and engage in a lifestyle that encourages balance and resilience.”

2. The Best Antidote to COVID-19 Fear: Facts

It’s normal to feel anxious in the face of so many unknowns but try to keep things in perspective. Remember, about 80 percent of people who become sick with COVID-19 can manage their recovery at home.

“Take a deep breath and remind yourself that most people who contract COVID-19 will only experience mild symptoms,” says Dr. Taylor.

3. Monitor Your Health for Changes

If you have a pre-existing mental health condition (like depression or anxiety), continue with your treatment, and be on the lookout for any changes, as stress can make you more likely to have new symptoms or a repeat of past symptoms.

If you’re feeling worried, express your feelings to a loved one, friend or family member. If you have a therapist, maintain a regular schedule. If that’s not possible, consider remote video sessions.

“And reach out to your healthcare providers for support,” adds Dr. Taylor. “We want to know how you’re doing!”

4. Control Panic with Slow, Deep Breathing

If you're feeling overwhelmed with panic, stop what you're doing and focus on your breathing. "This doesn't need to be anything major," says Dr. Taylor. "Take 3 to 5 slow breaths, tell yourself to 'slow down' or 'stay calm' or simply say 'breathe' and repeat."

You can help keep your mind steady by incorporating meditation into your life. If you're not ready to begin a meditation practice, try meditative body-based therapies, such tai chi or yoga, which can help you become more connected with your body.

5. Distance Yourself, Don't Isolate!

The public health intervention of "social distancing" is being used to lower one's risk of infection by maintaining approximately 6 feet of distance from others. While social distancing is helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19, many of us thrive on connection. "Distance yourself but don't isolate," says Dr. Taylor. "Stay connected with friends, family and coworkers with video chats, phone calls, texting and email."

6. Eat Healthy Foods

The best defense against COVID-19 is a healthy immune system. You can keep your immune system strong by fueling it with essential vitamins, minerals, fiber and protein. Eat a healthy diet by limiting sugar, dairy and refined foods. Eat beans and nuts, organic fruits and vegetables and lean meats sparingly.

7. Stay Active

Physical exercise is a great way to lower stress and boost your mood. If your gym is closed, why not take a walk in the woods? Try running early in the morning to avoid large gatherings of people. Are your fitness instructors offering virtual classes? There are countless free exercise videos online. Yoga has been shown to help manage stress response.

8. Make Sleep a Priority

Healthy eating and physical exercise are essential to good health, but many of us overlook the importance of sleep for enhancing our mental health and well-being. Getting too little sleep can affect mood, disrupt concentration and upset hormones that regulate weight. Be sure to make sleep a priority during the outbreak.

9. Turn Off the TV, Pick Up a Book

You could spend your time at home binging on movies and television shows, but why not crack open that book you've been meaning to read? Here are 12 books to consider reading, if you need ideas.

While it may be tempting to watch movies about infectious disease outbreaks, it may be better for your nerves to choose funny movies over thrillers. “During times of stress and anxiety, it’s easy to forget to let ourselves be and enjoy. Laughter has been shown to increase endorphins, soothe tension and provide instant stress relief,” says Dr. Taylor.

10. Take Advantage of Extra Time

Did you know that Isaac Newton invented calculus while social distancing from the Bubonic Plague? To be clear, those of us who are working remotely aren’t on vacation, but there might be creative ways of taking advantage of your extra time at home.

- **Education:** If school or daycare has closed, how can you spend more quality time with your kids? Can you find creative ways to participate in their learning? How can you help deliver learning activities provided by their teachers?
- **Creative Projects:** Is there a creative project you’ve been meaning to start? Social distancing might have freed up mental space to explore a project that’s been on the back burner. Why not write a chapter of that novel? Dust off a notebook and draw. Find a video online that teaches painting or origami.
- **Hobbies:** Some hobbies can put you into a relaxed mindset, such as crafts, cooking, writing or playing games. Maybe you’ve always enjoyed cooking but couldn’t find the time to spend in the kitchen. Why not try out a new recipe between conference calls?

This, Too, Shall Pass

We’ll get through this difficult time together. In the meantime, remember to stay informed and connected, get plenty of sleep, exercise and eat well. And don’t forget to breathe.

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