

COVID-19: 8 Tools to Manage Stress and Worry:

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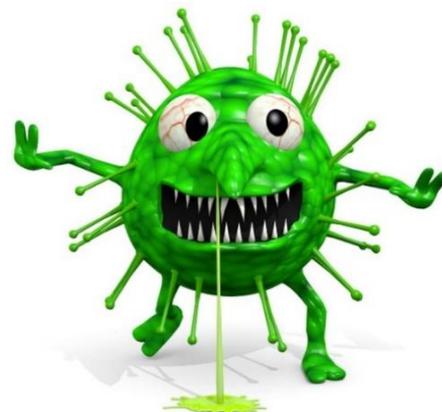
Here are some ideas that anyone can use to reduce and manage their anxiety levels while the corona virus is dominant in society and our minds.

1. Pause and reflect on what we are going through:

We need to validate our own feelings – e.g. “*I get why I’m anxious. Who wouldn’t be?! With all this information everywhere telling me the things that could go wrong*”.

Most of us feel worried about the spread of the virus for a few understandable reasons:

- It is unfamiliar and new, so we don’t quite know what we are trying to cope with
- There are changes every few days
- It’s going on and on without a break.



Let’s deepen our understanding of anxiety. Whenever we are worried or afraid, we are making automatic assumptions about the:

- Likelihood** of the bad outcome (e.g. ‘I’m very likely to get the corona virus’)
- Cost** to me if it did happen (e.g. ‘I’m going to end up in intensive care’)
- How I would **cope** (e.g. ‘I would be horribly distressed’ or ‘what if I go crazy?’)

It is important to remember that, a lot of the time, our automatic assumptions aren’t accurate.

2. Be ‘the curious observer’

It is important that we don’t take our thoughts as ‘truth’ – sometimes they are reflective of reality and sometimes they are not. Be the ‘*curious observer*’ by testing your thoughts against the truth. For example, look for *reliable* articles on the rate of serious illness and the number of people who get a mild case. List your safety factors (e.g. age or access to hospital).

3. Does worry keep you safe? (Or just worried?)

We often *feel* like we *should* worry when we sense a threat around us. But be curious about this. Worrying will not prevent you or someone you love from getting sick because it rarely leads to taking action. The ‘what if...’ worries generally do NOT keep us safe or solve problems. They make us anxious with no actual gain.

Decide if your worry relates to a problem in the world that you can do something about, or if it is a “what if...” worry. This is an important distinction. “What if...” worries are things that might happen but we don’t know. If it is a ‘what if...’ worry, then keep things in proportion and seek out information to reassure yourself. Thereafter, try to give yourself permission to ignore then next 100 times that same “what if...” worry TRIES to get back into your mind.

4. Focus on what you CAN DO (and don’t worry about the rest)

If worrying does not keep us safe, then what does? Taking well-informed action helps. Read advice from the Australian government about what we should all do, then make your own action plan (including things like hand hygiene and social distancing). Once these actions are scheduled, make a commitment to yourself that from then on you will be either engaged in one of these actions or you are not thinking about this at all.

5. Ration your news and social media coverage

Every media source has a *constant* stream on the corona virus. The nature of news in most outlets is less about reliably informing us and more about attracting our attention. So, emotive words and sensational headlines are employed and we only hear about bad news. Social media only gets filtered into your feed if it is sensational and grabs attention, so it is also biased in the negative. Even posts from friends tend to be about the virus. It is flooding our attention and affecting our mood unnecessarily. You probably already know 95% of all you need to know about the corona virus. Reading more articles about several more people getting infected will *not* increase your awareness or your safety. Instead, you can limit yourself to 45 minutes per day to do appropriate research (e.g. looking at government advice or watching the news at a set time). Resist urges to look at your phone unless it is within one of the scheduled times to do so.

6. Accept uncertainty

Despite our best efforts, there is so much that we cannot know about the health and social outcomes that may occur. *Trying to eliminate uncertainty leads to unproductive worry.* So, we are better off accepting that there are things we cannot control or know for sure. Redirect your attention to things you can control (see point 4 above). If we cannot answer a question, we need to let it go. If you're finding it particularly hard to feel comfortable with the unpredictability of things, then you need to make a conscious effort to notice how uncertainty makes you feel and allow that feeling to be there. It may be tempting to get caught up in the worry and irritation. Acknowledge the desire for more certainty, then pick an action that you CAN DO.

7. Be appreciative and grateful

We can step away from the doom-and-gloom feeling that seems to seep into society in many ways. The self-care ideas (below) will help. We can also stop occasionally and realise that we still have many things to be thankful for. No matter how tough things are, there will always be things to appreciate (nature, art, the goodness of people, small things that we can do, and so on).

8. Self-care

The worry and the river of media make us emotionally exhausted. Make a list of your favourite stress-busting activities that you can do even while observing hygiene and distancing practices.

| Do More of | Do Less of |
|--|---|
| Exercise safely (e.g. go for a walk) | Listening to all your worry thoughts |
| Seek out nature (a park or a tree) | Comparing yourself to others |
| Listen to your favourite music | Looking at social media many times a day |
| Watch a movie or series | Looking at too much traditional news |
| Stay connected to friends | Not getting enough sleep |
| Relaxation: try online meditation; take a bath | Alcohol to reduce stress |
| Eat a healthy diet and get enough sleep | Eating sugary foods and drinking caffeine |

Seek professional help if you need it.

If your mood changes are too strong, ask your GP for a referral to a clinical psychologist. You can also find a fully qualified (post-grad degree and clinical training) psychologist via the Australian Clinical Psychology Association <https://acpa.org.au/find-a-clinical-psychologist/>

If you want more information or an online consultation contact us.

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