

Looking After Your Health During COVID 19

Source: Australian Psychological Society, Intensive Care Society UK

As the number of coronavirus cases rise across Australia, the level of anxiety within the community is increasing. Feelings of worry and unease can be expected following a stressful event, such as the recent declaration of a global pandemic, however, it is important that we learn to manage our stress before it turns to more severe anxiety and panic. This information sheet outlines some useful strategies which can help both adults and children cope with the stress or anxiety experienced as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Learn the facts - Constant media coverage about the coronavirus can keep us in a heightened state of anxiety. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports can cause anyone to feel worried. Try to limit related media exposure and instead seek out factual information from reliable sources such as the Australian Government's health alert or other trusted organisations such as the World Health Organization.

Keep things in perspective - Feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your colleagues are likely going through. It is normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak. Managing your stress/psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health. When we are stressed, it is easy to see things as worse than they really are. Rather than imagining the worst-case scenario and worrying about it, ask yourself:

- Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome?
- Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be? Remember, illness due to coronavirus infection is usually mild and most people recover without needing specialised treatment.
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope? Sometimes thinking about how you would cope, even if the worst were to happen, can help you put things into perspective.
- This is an unprecedented scenario, don't try to learn new strategies, use the ones that you have used in the past to manage times of stress.
- This is likely to be a marathon - pace yourself
- Consider your psychological energy levels - you will need to "fill up" after "emptying the tank"
- Be aware of your "bandwidth"- it might take longer to think things through and make sense of things if you are feeling overwhelmed
- Beware dramatic language that might panic your colleagues.

STOP, BREATHE, then THINK- slowing your breathing slows the stress cycle and re-engages your frontal lobes - then you can think.



Take reasonable precautions - Being proactive by following basic hygiene principles can keep your anxiety at bay. The World Health Organization recommends a number of protective measures against the coronavirus, including to:

- wash your hands frequently
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- clean surfaces at home including door handles with disinfectant
- social distancing - stay at home if you begin to feel unwell until you fully recover
- seek medical care early if you have a fever, cough or experience breathing difficulties.

Practise self-care while in self isolation or quarantine - To help encourage a positive frame of mind, it is important to look after yourself. Everybody practises self-care differently with some examples including:

- remind yourself that this is a temporary period of isolation to slow the spread of the virus
- remember that your effort is helping others in the community avoid contracting the virus
- maintaining good social connections and communicating openly with family and friends via phone/email/video conferencing such as Zoom and Skype
- Connect with others via the Beyond Blue forums thread: Coping during the coronavirus outbreak
- making time for activities and hobbies you enjoy
- keeping up a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting quality sleep and avoiding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to cope with stress
- establish routines as best possible and try to view this period as a new experience that can bring health benefits
- for those working from home, try to maintain a healthy balance by allocating specific work hours, taking regular breaks and, if possible, establishing a dedicated work space
- avoid news and social media if you find it distressing
- practising relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to give your body a chance to settle and readjust to a calm state.

Notice and limit worry triggers- As the health situation develops it can feel like we need to constantly follow the news or check social media for updates. However, you might notice this also triggers your worry and anxiety. Try to notice what triggers your worry. For example, is it watching the news for more than 30 minutes? Checking social media every hour? Try to limit the time that you are exposed to worry triggers each day. You might choose to listen to the news at a set time each day, or you could limit the amount of time you spend on social media or news.

Seek additional support when needed - If you feel that the stress or anxiety you experience as a result of the coronavirus is impacting on everyday life, a psychologist may be able to help. Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals, skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.



Free psychological counselling services are available through:

At this stressful time the Cairnmillar Institute is now offering free counselling and mental health services. The Community Clinic can be accessed remotely from anywhere in Australia using phone and or video calling, during business hours.

Ph: 1800 391 393

Web address: <https://www.cairnmillar.org.au>