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Tips for Managing COVID-19 Anxiety

The fear pandemic is something that each of us has to manage – anxiety loves the words “what if” – so how can you manage your head and overcome your feelings when they are overwhelming and how can you help others who may be struggling too?

1 Scale how you feel from 1 to 10

With 1 being the worst you've ever felt and 10 being the best you've ever felt, what number are you right now? It is a subjective measure, but it is a useful one. Whatever number you are, how can you increase it by 1? What do you need to do, and who can help you? We are all on an emotional “CoronaCoaster” – reset your head every day with rational information, avoid going down the rabbit hole for long. It is OK to be uncertain and feel sad for a short time, but then you need to act to improve your mood.

2 Accept the advice we are being given

Acceptance can be hard and we are frightened. But rebelling against it will prolong the time we are needing to practice social distancing and isolation. Being separated is not our natural response and so the more accountable we can be, and the more responsible we are by making good choices, the better. If you are someone who always finds a way around the rules, with an instinct to rebel, remember to do what's good for you and your family in the long term. So, let's just do as we are told.

3 Manage your self-talk

How are you talking to yourself in your head? Would you talk to anyone else like that? If you wouldn't, then be kinder to yourself. Even if you change how you are speaking to yourself just once a day (and you don't even have to believe it right now), it will make a difference to how you feel. Change the negative words to positive, be nurturing, embrace your weird.

4 Recognise what you can control and influence

You have control over you and can influence the people around you, family and friends, but the rest falls into the “circle of concern”, which is a reactive and less positive place to be and causes anxiety and panic. It is important to recognise what you can choose to let go of.

5 Ask for help

Are you good at asking for help or do you avoid it? Think about who can help you, and who you can help. We are in this together, and if we don't help one another, then the tougher this will be. Reciprocity is something that we use in business – help others for the right reasons, and then good stuff comes back to you (at some point!).

6 Take time out

Manage social media and news access. Our brains are not meant to function 24 hours a day. Decide on your trusted news provider and check in with that. Follow the government's briefings – they're in charge of the decisions that are being made – then switch it off because the rest is, for the most part, supposition.

7 Avoid your head catastrophising

When we catastrophise, we look to the worst-case scenario. At the moment, the worst case is being ill and dying, or losing someone we love. The balance of evidence to this is that if we are following the advice, we are minimising the chances greatly of that untoward event occurring.

8 Manage your time

Either plan together, with work colleagues or family – can you have a shared timetable? Take breaks together. We are all sailing through the same storm and there needs to be boundaries in place, but be mindful of your energy levels and work, and be active when they are high so you are effective (don't be too hard on yourself if energy levels dip!).

9 Access therapy

The power of having a safe space to talk cannot be underestimated to help you to be well. You might not be able to see someone face to face, but feedback we are getting from clients who are using the different technologies we have to offer (phone, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp) has been really positive, saying that it is as good as sitting in a room with their therapist or legal advisor.

10 Stay in touch

Keep contact with each other over the phone, Skype, Zoom, Facetime or WhatsApp. Write letters, have virtual coffee breaks with family, friends and colleagues – anything that keeps you connected.

11 Have a purpose

If you are working from home, keep to your routine – our heads like routine and being organised. If you are not working, decide what you would like to do and see the time as an opportunity. Are there jobs or interests that you have not had time to do that you can use this time to explore? There are some great free courses out there at the moment with lots of content advertised on LinkedIn.

12 Look at your finances

Whilst there either is, or may be, financial hardship, there is a lot of information out there that is free and can help to navigate through what is available. Ask for help, pick up the phone and negotiate what you need. Do not ignore the situation.

13 Clear your space

Your environment can reflect how your head is. Clear the clutter and feel in control of your space. In a time when there are things we cannot control, taking control of what you can is important.

14 Exercise

Whatever that means to you. Walking (whilst distancing), a HIIT session, weights (if you have them), cycling... whatever – expand your lung capacity and increase your heart rate. It is possible that you could be more healthy and fit at the end of this time than at the beginning!

15 Evaluate lifestyle choices

Using alcohol, substances, smoking, and over-eating as a coping mechanism is counter-productive for your mental and physical health. Try to do something more positive to help yourself (tips #14 and #19).

16 Be creative

Being creative can be really therapeutic. If your first response to this is “I'm not creative at all”, it can take many different guises. This could be anything from drawing to writing, gardening, cooking, doing a jigsaw, playing with Lego, starting an online community group – again, whatever works for you.

17 Humour

We are British! Humour is our birth right – so use it. Alexis has worked in mental health services for years and, being the mum to three children, uses humour – it's a great way of lifting our mood and feeling more perspective.

18 Buffer children

Children and young people have access to all sorts of information now. Be mindful of the conversations you have with them and in front of them. They need us, as adults, to make sense of what is happening in an age-appropriate way. They will remember how we dealt with this and it will inform their learned responses in the future. Both of the authors of this article have children aged between 7 and 15 – some knowledge is helpful, having the news on all the time is not.

19 Rest well, eat well

This has been the basic advice for many years for a reason. It is imperative that we fuel ourselves in the right way and give ourselves a chance for recovery. We may not have the foods we would like to have at the moment, not due to supply issues, but due to people issues – but there are different foods you could have. If you are a key worker and work feels relentless at the moment, as a minimum, rest when you can and ask for help when you need it.

20 Be grateful

This sounds like a really “counsellory” thing to say, but it's true. Being grateful for what and who we have in our lives, and our current health situation, grounds us and helps us to focus less on what we feel we don't have – it's a great antidote to fear and anxiety.



Contacts