

Managing Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19

Mixed emotions, including stress and worry are understandable given the current outbreak, and it is important to look after yourself while you continue to support our community members.

Continue to attend to self-care



Stress can affect your appetite, but it's important to keep your body healthy with regular, balanced meals.

Stress can impact your sleep - implement a wind-down period before bed where you prepare your mind and body for sleep (ie: dim the lights, put away the phone, have a soothing decaf tea, read a book that will not cause over-stimulation).

Exercise is a proven way to balance out stress hormones - go for a walk outside or do an exercise video from home.

Limit your exposure to news and social media that may increase worry/anxiety - the news contributes to our hyperfocus on negative occurrences, when in fact there are lots of other positive things happening around us.

Schedule enjoyable activities that will both distract you, and bring some enjoyment to your day.

Stay connected! Continue to talk with friends and relatives, and try to talk about a *range* of topics.

Implement Stress Management Strategies

Challenge your Thoughts:

Anxiety causes us to pay more attention to negative information than neutral or positive information.

Recognize what thoughts you are having and ask yourself - are these thoughts facts or assumptions?



Remember the facts

Most people who become infected with COVID-19 do not experience serious symptoms and recover without need for medical attention.

Maintaining 2 metres distance and hand washing for 20+ seconds remain your best protection.

Grounding with the 5 Senses:

Often in stressful situations, we become focused on our worrisome thoughts and uncomfortable internal body sensations - broaden your awareness by practicing grounding.

Try describing the environment around you.

5 things you can see (describe them in detail - the colour, shape, etc)

4 things you can touch (again in detail - smooth? rough? hard?)

3 things you can hear (your own breath? the clock ticking? a car driving by?)

2 things you can smell (or imagine your favourite smells)

1 thing you can taste (or take a deep breath)

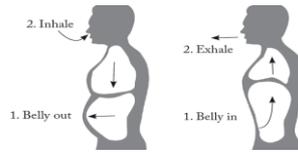
Take 5: Practice taking 5 deep belly breaths.

Put one hand on your chest, and the other on your belly.

As you take a long, slow breathe in through your nose, imagine you are filling a balloon in your stomach with air - allow the hand on our stomach to rise, while the hand on your chest remains still.

As you breathe out slowly from your mouth, allow the hand on your stomach to drop

*Try counting your breath - in for 4 seconds, pause, and out for 6.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

We carry a lot of stress and worry in our muscles- sometimes without realizing it. Practice this as a way to systematically evoke relaxation. Slowly tense each muscle group for approx. 5 sec, avoiding areas that cause you any pain.

- Raise your eyebrows, feeling the muscles tighten in your forehead. Hold that tension. Then tightly lower your eyebrows and scrunch your eyes closed, feeling the tension in your forehead and eyes. Hold it tightly. And then relax.
- Tightly close your mouth, clamping your jaw shut, very tightly. Feel the tension in your jaws. Hold.... and then relax.
- Raise your shoulders up toward your ears... tighten the muscles there.... hold.....and then release. Allow your shoulders to relax.
- Clench your hands into fists. Very tightly as if you are squeezing a lemon in each hand.... hold... feel the tension in your hands and forearms..... And release.
- Now bring your awareness to your upper legs... tense the muscles in your thighs and buttocks...hold...feel the tension in your upper legs...and then release allowing your muscles to relax.
- Next tighten your calf muscles... point your toes up towards your knees and squeeze these muscles. Hold for a moment, and then relax.
- Finally, take a few slow, deep belly breaths, allowing your body to feel calm and relaxed.

Keep a Gratitude Journal:

Sometimes it's hard to feel thankful in a time of crisis, but research shows that by purposefully calling to mind things that we are grateful for in our daily lives, overall levels of stress can be reduced.

- Each day record 3 things or people that you are thankful for having in your life
- Try to elaborate on the detail of each of these - why are you grateful for these things?
- Share your journal with others - these are great talking points to help lift others' spirits instead of focusing on the latest news

Ask for help! Uncertainty and change often cause people to struggle a little bit more, but these struggles tend to become compounded if you try to ignore them, or pretend they don't exist. If you are having a difficult time - reach out because

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!