Ways to cope with anxiety & stress during the COVID-19 outbreak.

A normal reaction to a really abnormal situation

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, including 24/7 news reports, travel restrictions, working from home, pending social isolation logistics and concerns for your own and your loved ones' health, it is totally normal to experience a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions.

You or someone you know may experience periods of:

- Feeling stressed or overwhelmed
- Anxiety, worry, or fear
- Sadness, tearfulness, and/or loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities
- Physical symptoms, such as increased heart rate, stomach upset, low energy or other uncomfortable sensations.
- Frustration, irritability, or anger
- Feeling helpless
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Increasing use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs
- Worsening of current health issues not related to COVID-19
- Isolating or withdrawing from others, and/or fear of going to public spaces
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you unique and different from other people, and the community in which you live.

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use

10 ways to cope with stress, anxiety or distress

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** In situations like this that are uncertain and evolving, it's understandable to feel stressed, anxious, or upset, among other emotional reactions. Allow yourself time to notice and express what you're feeling. This could be by writing them down in a journal, talking to others, doing something creative, or practising meditation.

2. **Maintain your day-to-day normal activities and routine where possible.** Having a healthy routine can have a positive impact on your thoughts and feelings. This can include: eating healthy meals, physical exercise like walking, running or stretching, getting enough sleep, and doing things you enjoy.

3. **Self-care and self-compassion** - Take breaks and make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Try taking in slow breaths and downshifting your fight-flight response through relaxation techniques.

4. **Stay connected.** Receiving support and care from others has a powerful effect on helping us cope with challenges. Spending time with supportive family and friends can bring a sense of comfort and stability. Talking through our concerns, thoughts, and feelings with others can also help us find helpful ways of thinking about or dealing with a stressful situation.

5. **Seek accurate information.** Finding credible sources you can trust is important to avoid the fear and panic that can be caused by misinformation.

6. **Set limits around news and social media.** It's understandable to want to keep informed, especially if you or your loved ones are affected. At the same time, constantly reading, watching, or listening to upsetting media coverage can unnecessarily intensify worry and agitation. Take a break from news or social media, especially if there's no new information. Focus on things that are positive in your life and actions you have control over.

7. **Follow protection and prevention recommendations provided by qualified health professionals.** The Australian Department of Health has information about COVID-19 and how to protect yourself including sanitary precautions, social distancing advice and what to do if you are isolate at home.

8. **Pay attention to your body, feelings, and spirit**: recognise and heed early warning signs of stress. Recognise how your own past experiences affect your way of thinking and feeling about this event, and think of how you handled your thoughts, emotions, and behaviour around past events.

   Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after an event like an infectious disease outbreak, even when it does not directly threaten you.

9. **Enjoy conversation unrelated to the outbreak**, to remind yourself of the many important and positive things in your lives. Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.

10. **Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family** can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

Keep in mind why we are doing this, together. Beating this requires literally a war-time effort from us all. Our lives have changed, but not all for the worse. We now have a window to be citizens, to look after each other and do the right thing. It looks as though we are now rapidly approaching the fast growth part of the pandemic. Our priorities have to be community first, safety first and to save lives now. We all have our part to play and we will get through this and come out the other end hopefully different but stronger, wiser and more connected.

For more support

Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

As of now, anyone who has travelled overseas should self-isolate for 14 days when they enter Australia or if they have been exposed to someone confirmed to have COVID-19 until tested and medically cleared.cFor more information in South Australia, contact the Coronavirus Health Information line on 1800 020 080 or go to sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019.

Know when to get help - You may experience serious distress when you hear about an infectious disease outbreak, even if you are at little or no risk of getting sick. If you or someone you know shows signs of distress for several days or weeks, get help by accessing support resources. Contact 000 right away if you or someone you know states they are going to hurt or kill him- or herself or someone else, or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.

Emergency support

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call emergency services (triple zero - 000), contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information - 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on 000 (or 112 from a mobile phone)
- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467

The Human Psychology team want to help in any way we can. For our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) organisations, you can access face-to-face or tele-health sessions by calling 1300 277 924.   We are pivoting our training content to deliver on-line within weeks and will be offering free webinars, tip sheets and a pod cast. We've got this.