

Coping with COVID-19

Many of us are now feeling more stress and anxiety—some of us may at times be near panic. Remember: anxiety is one of our survival skills. In times like this, however, we must soothe and manage it—even though it’s against our instinct to do this. Purposeful practice is key. During heightened stress, practice heightened coping.

Find Your Calm Space

Our *fight or flight* stress hormones trigger the unpleasant physical response we're all familiar with. This can then trigger a sense of alarm, and as our body signals our brain to worry more, it affects our thinking.

These hormones may also cause us to *overestimate* danger and *underestimate* our own coping skills and ability to respond. All of this makes sense when there’s a tiger in the forest, but less so today. Some of the best helpful practices include:

- Controlled breathing. Slow your breathing regularly—a full minute twice a day, and every time you think of it.
- Physical activity. Put your adrenaline to good use. Even a little is better than none, and a little nearly every day is better than occasional.
- Enjoyable activities. To counter our many hours of work, we need small pleasures. These can help reduce both anxiety and depression, just as eating reduces hunger. Plan for or notice at least one thing every day, paying attention to tiny, momentary pleasures. Think of how you feel when you smile or laugh – as they say, laughter is the best medicine.
- Accomplishment. While work often fills this need, right now you may need to take more moments throughout your day to notice and say, “I got *that* done.”

Remember – if you’re feeling more stress, the activities above are literally counter-instinctive, so *scheduled, purposeful effort* is needed. You are worth the effort and will reap the rewards.

Move Through Worry

Rather than trying to limit worry (you can't not think!), ask yourself, “What is the worst that might happen”? This allows your mind to do what it needs to do – jump to worst case scenarios. It’s better to meet your fears and give yourself permission to feel them than try to push them out. Then you can form responses. Your “What if?” becomes “Then what?” Allow yourself to consider the following:

- “If my worst-case scenario should really come to pass, how will I cope?” List *all* that you can do, including peaceful acceptance of what may come. While we may not have control over everything that happens, we do have the most control over how we prepare, process, and move through things.

Minimize Damage

Take care not to practice unhealthy coping strategies like over-using alcohol and other substances. Social withdrawal or staying engaged without any rest are other ways of coping. Over-consuming daily news is another way for some of us. Consider what you can do to guard against things that may cause more harm than good.

Name it and Tame it

Because anxiety “shouts”, it makes it hard to notice other emotions. Recognizing the softer ones helps balance the noise. Try finding descriptive words (use this [list of feelings](#) if you need help) to identify what you feel at any moment. And remember, sadness is ok when you allow yourself to feel it, and then move through it.

Let Values Guide You

What would you do if distress wasn't taking up your energy and time? Whether it's home relationships, community, exercise, religion/spirituality, study, arts – whatever values you hold high, don't give anxiety the power to take you from them.

Discover Opportunity

Highly disruptive times have unexpected positive outcomes. Amidst stress, pain, fatigue and loss, our shared purpose in facing adversity gives rise to wonderful collaboration and innovation. You could develop levels of maturity and wisdom you never expected. You may experience – whether within yourself or others – grace, citizen leadership, new reserves of strength, and quiet acts of unsung heroism. This is your moment to seek and seize such amazing opportunities.

First, settle. Then shine.