

CORONAVIRUS and MENTAL HEALTH

What To Expect - Typical Reactions

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations such as an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. Almost 25% of people in a very recent U.S. survey found that since coronavirus they had clinical and serious anxiety levels, with concerns raised including:

- Their own health status
- The health status of others whom they may have exposed to the disease
- The experience of self-monitoring, or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of the disease
- Time taken off from work and the potential loss of income and job security
- The challenges of securing things you need, such as groceries and personal care items
- Concern about being able to effectively care for children or others in your care
- Uncertainty or frustration about how long you will need to remain in this situation, and uncertainty about the future
- Loneliness associated with feeling cut off from the world and from loved ones
- Anger if you think you were exposed to the disease because of others' negligence
- Boredom and frustration because you may not be able to work or engage in regular day-to-day activities
- Uncertainty or ambivalence about the situation
- A desire to use alcohol or drugs to cope
- Symptoms of depression, such as feelings of hopelessness, changes in appetite, or sleeping too little or too much
- Symptoms of reawakened post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as intrusive distressing memories, flashbacks (reliving the event), nightmares, changes in thoughts and mood, and being easily startled

If you or someone you know seems to be experience any of these reactions for 2 to 4 weeks or more and their symptoms appear serious, you might want to have them [self-screen to determine the severity of their issue](#), [have a look at this virus anxiety toolkit](#), [check out this collection of resources on anxiety](#), [take advantage of this large collection of U.S. resources](#) and work on [building their coping skills online](#), contact a mental health provider if it might be helpful to have personal support, or if they seem at all desperate or suicidal call a [crisis line](#).

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association has also been kind enough to provide an online health resource called [i Matter](#) that has a wealth of good quality information for veterinarians – and strategies for high level mental wellness that can be used by everyone, regardless of whether or not they are currently struggling with their mental health!

Ways To Support Yourself During Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation

UNDERSTAND THE RISK

Take steps to get the facts. Stay up to date on what is happening, while limiting your media exposure to regular times. Avoid watching or listening to news reports 24/7 since this tends to increase anxiety and worry. Remember that children are especially affected by what they hear and see on television and you may not want young children to watch the news with you at this time. Check out this key list of credible news sources in Canada (and an international news organization keeping track of the overall picture):

www.canada.ca www.cbc.ca – live news briefings at noon from public health and politicians

- your provincial government, e.g. www.ontario.ca - your local public health unit's website

For a good global picture of country-by-country, provincial and state caseloads:

<https://bnonews.com/index.php/2020/02/tracking-coronavirus-live-news-updates/>

Stop and Breathe

You probably already know many of the things people recommend to reduce stress and burnout. We won't repeat them all, because sometimes when people hear these recommendations repeated over and over there's almost subconscious message that we "should" be doing these things and "if we were doing them right we would be fine". That's not true – and it's not the message we want to convey.

However, here is very simple breathing suggestion that mental health experts say will improve our ability to manage anxiety – they suggest we do three times daily when we can manage it.

Breathing helps us manage the anxiety response on a physical, physiological and mental level. The physical level is how the body reacts physically. The physiological response centers on the nervous system. And of course, our mental responses relate to how our brain is responding to stress. Breathing deeply has the remarkable power to affect us on all three levels.

Deep breathing helps slow down the sympathetic nervous system — the fight or flight response associated with anxiety. Breathing also helps turn on the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps us restore balance and can provide a sense of calm and focus according to leading psychology experts.

Simply engage in slow, deep, deliberate breathing for about three to five minutes per session. Breathe in through your nose for a count of four. Hold for a count of four. Breathe out from your mouth for a count of four. Hold for a count of four and repeat. If you find yourself getting dizzy or out of breath, just return to your natural breathing for a minute as a break then start again if you feel it was helpful.

Of course, if you have existing health issues this might not be the specific exercise for you. Googling "mindfulness meditation" can bring up many others that might be more suitable. The good news is - you don't need any special equipment, but if an app helps, check out the free version of an app called [Insight Timer](#) or this [free guided meditation on YouTube](#).