

What To Do If You're Anxious About Coronavirus

Here are some ways to cope if you feel weighed down by COVID-19 concerns.

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With the rise in reported cases of the new coronavirus around the world, many people are feeling anxious and afraid about a looming pandemic. For those in China, the disease's epicenter, its toll on mental health is well-documented. But even in areas not yet heavily affected by COVID-19, people are expressing their worries.

"When the news covers the outbreak of a virus, it is common for people who consume a lot of news media to feel a rise in anxiety," Nicole Bentley, a licensed therapist and intake coordinator at Cityscape Counseling in Chicago, told HuffPost. "Symptoms could include rumination about the virus, fear of catching the virus even if it isn't in their area, difficulty sleeping and increased efforts to stay healthy."

For some, anxiety about coronavirus may affect their ability to function at work or otherwise go about their lives. If you're feeling this way, know that there are things you can do to deal with it.

HuffPost spoke to Bentley and other mental health experts to identify some of the best ways to cope with this kind of anxiety.

Take a break from the news.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by concerns about coronavirus, consider monitoring and potentially limiting the amount of media you consume.

"I would recommend filtering their media coverage about coronavirus. People don't have to avoid the news altogether if they don't want to, but they also don't need to obsessively stay up to date, either," Bentley said. "Staying overly connected to news coverage can negatively impact mental health, so it is important to monitor their intake if they notice a rise in anxiety."

It can be very beneficial just to take an hour or so away from the constant updates and information on TV and online. Needing a reprieve is natural and human.

"Keep in perspective how many times you are hearing about the virus and how much energy you are devoting to thinking about it every day. This is not something to obsess over, but rather to be conscious and aware of — vigilant, but realistic in your thoughts and approach," said Esther Saggurthi, primary clinician at [Maryland House Detox](#), a [Delphi Behavioral Health Group](#) facility.

"The mind works off of the power of suggestion," she added. "When we keep hearing about the coronavirus, we visualize what it would be like to be sick or to have a loved one sick, and then often we get scared, as the outbreak is something we cannot control."

Talk to someone.

It may feel tempting to cut off communication with others when you're feeling anxious, but talking to someone about these emotions can be very helpful.

"How many times do we all try to look good on the outside when inside we are really panicked or depressed?" Saggurthi noted. "The only way for someone to understand how we are feeling or what we are thinking is for us to talk about it and tell them."

Talking to someone, even if just via text, can help you process your emotions and feel supported, rather than spiraling further.

Try to be present in the moment.

“It is critical to remain connected to the present moment, rather than allowing their fear to take over,” Bentley noted.

If your mind is starting to wander into scary territory, try focusing on your immediate environment and mentally take stock of the things and people around you. That can help you stay grounded and keep things in perspective.

The unknowns surrounding coronavirus can be scary, but it’s helpful to focus on the here and now. At the moment, the threat to you personally is likely not immediate.

“Positive affirmations are especially helpful,” Saggurthi said. “I am healthy today. I live a healthful life. I have control over my life. I am at peace. I feel calm.”

Remind yourself what you can control.

“It is easy to feel like one’s life is out of control and focus on the futility of life in these situations,” Saggurthi said. “The increased anxiety over a situation which is mostly beyond our control may cause us to rationalize and make poor decisions and may result in returning to behaviors we were working hard to quit in the first place.”

But while the actions of world governments and fellow citizens are out of your control, you do have power over yourself.

“It is important to remind yourself of what is in your control,” advised. “Make sure to wash your hands. Be on the lookout for flu-like symptoms.”

You can use your anxiety as a signal to take reasonable [steps to prepare](#) for a pandemic, [Jonathan Sutton](#), director of the cognitive behavioral therapies program at The Family Institute at Northwestern University, told HuffPost. Find a trusted source of information and stick to that one to insulate yourself from rumors and falsehoods.

“What reputable information do you need to know at this point? The CDC and WHO fit the bill for me,” he noted. “Based on the best available medical information, are there steps that are relevant for you to take at this time and will you take them?”

Practice gratitude.

If you’re ever feeling dark, identifying and [giving thanks](#) for the points of brightness in your life can help you get out of this headspace. Consider making a mental list of the things you’re grateful for or keeping a gratitude journal.

As Bentley noted, “it is helpful to practice gratitude in moments of panic, because it can keep someone grounded in the present moment and appreciative for what they have in their lives.”

Reach out for help.

It’s natural to experience anxiety and other emotional struggles amid a global health crisis. If the feelings worsen or continue to interfere with your ability to concentrate, sleep or care for yourself or your family, it’s important to seek professional help.

Many employers and communities offer mental health resources. If you’re feeling as though you might act in a way that harms yourself or someone else, call a support line like the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) (1-800-273-8255) or [Crisis Text Line](#) by texting “start” to 741-741.