

COPING WITH THE FEAR OF CORONAVIRUS

Anxiety is understandably high as we are learning more about the spread of COVID-19. The information below may be helpful in managing the fear you may feel. Resources for up-to-date medical information and advice about coronavirus are at the end of the article.

Managing fears

A good way to manage any kind of fear is to become educated about it. The more we know about the real dangers, the more we can take effective steps to avoid or minimize them, thereby putting some fears to rest. Accurate information is an effective antidote to unrealistic fears. The resources at the end of this article are a good source of accurate information.

Monitor your exposure to the news. Media news coverage can arouse emotion and increase fear. It's important to get the facts, but it may not be helpful to hear reports over and over. Be aware of how you and family members respond to news stories. Limit television or online coverage if it becomes distressing.

Put your risk into perspective. The term "pandemic" can be very scary. It's important to stay aware and informed, but try to make sure your level of fear does not exceed your risk factors.

Focus on what you have control over. News stories and images about the spread of a disease can make us feel anxious and helpless. Knowing how to minimize your risk can reduce anxiety. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have information about how to reduce your risk of contracting the virus.

Be always aware, but not always fearful.

Awareness means paying attention to news that is specific to where you live. Awareness is not the same as being in constant fear. Constant fear can create stress and be counter-productive. It can be harder to deal with a true risk when everything seems like a danger. We want to focus on what *is* happening, rather than getting caught up in thoughts of what *could* happen.

Take a break from the fears. Like changing a channel on TV – intentionally shift your focus away from stressful thoughts. Spend time doing things that can distract you from worries and that help you feel more calm and balanced.

Notice if fear begins to become panic. It's normal to be afraid, but if you find yourself needing extra support due to being anxious the majority of time, having difficulty sleeping or finding yourself unable to cope, you might want to talk to a professional. A licensed professional can help you understand the root of your feelings and work with you to find management strategies targeted specifically to you.

If children have fears, give them honest information at a level they can understand. You don't need to explain everything about the virus and risk. Give them only as much information as they request. Encourage your children to talk to you about their thoughts and feelings. Listen to their concerns, and then reassure them. Explain that there are steps that everyone can take to protect themselves. Limit your child's exposure to news reports. Seeing repeated coverage can be disturbing. It can be helpful to watch the news with your child and discuss it afterwards.

We have to walk a fine line between awareness and fear. Try to keep your thoughts in sync with what is actually happening, not what your worst fears may be. Understand that national and international health organizations are working diligently to understand the risks and keep the public safe.

Resources for more information

World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

WHO travel information: www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

CDC travel information: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html

Get support.

Talking through concerns and sharing your fears can help you put them in perspective and help you feel calmer. You may want to reach out for professional support if you are struggling.

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