

Coping with Stress and Anxiety Amidst COVID-19

The University of Regina recognizes that during this time of change many may feel uncertainty and fear along with an array of other emotions. There may be concerns that affect your decisions about how to best manage your health and the health of those around you. In an effort to support you, we have put together a list of coping strategies and support resources to manage stress and anxiety

Acknowledge your feelings. What can we do to manage the stress and anxiety that may occur during this time of uncertainty? Plenty, starting with recognizing that **it makes sense to feel stress or anxiety in these circumstances**. There's nothing weak or irrational about feeling stressed or anxious during this time of uncertainty. In fact, accepting this is the first step towards managing your emotions. Allow yourself time to notice and express what you're feeling (without judgment). You can do this by writing your feelings and thoughts down in a journal, talking to trusted others, and/or expressing them through a creative activity.

Breathe. When we are stressed or anxious, our breathing becomes more shallow and our lungs are not being filled with air from the bottom-up. This, in turn, promotes more stress. Learning how to breathe "correctly" is important for all of us but especially when we are stressed and anxious. To do this, take a moment and exhale to empty your lungs then slowly breathe in picturing your breath going all the way down to your diaphragm and filling your lungs from the bottom to top (when doing this, picture your lungs like empty balloons being filled up with air). When your lungs are filled, there will be a natural pause, then exhale. Don't rush this – you don't want to get light-headed. Do this a few times then notice how your body feels more relaxed.

Pay attention to your thoughts. Your body responds to what you think about, so if you are having a lot of worry thoughts, your body is going to be tense and you are going to experience emotional distress. Notice your thoughts and if they are not serving you well, change them. You can direct your thoughts once you begin paying attention to them. One way to do this is to think about the things that are in your control (which is especially important when our thoughts are filled with all the things that are truly out of our control!). Another way to do this is through mindfulness, which is basically tuning into the present moment: what do you see, feel, hear, smell, taste? For example, if you are drinking a cup of coffee, notice the feel of the coffee when it touches your lips, smell the aroma of the coffee, the feel of the mug in your hands, the movement of your hands to your mouth, etc. Be in the present moment rather than in the run-away worry thoughts.

Maintain healthy activities. This includes mindful eating and movement. Try to keep nutrition in mind by eating healthy meals and snacks. Healthy activities also include physical exercise like walking, running or stretching; getting enough sleep and maintaining a regular sleep schedule; and doing things you enjoy and give you energy.

Set limits around news and social media. It's understandable to want to keep informed, but it is necessary to take breaks from it. Set up boundaries that work for you that keep you informed while not taking up most of your time and energy, such as checking in on social media for 10 minutes every few hours. Set an alarm on your cell to help keep this boundary.

Stay connected to others. Although we are keeping our physical distance from most people at this time, we can still give and receive support to/from each other with the use of technology. Connecting with supportive family and friends through video calls, texts, phone calls, etc. can bring a sense of comfort and stability. Talking through our concerns, thoughts, and feelings with others can also help us dealing with a stressful situation.

Manage information sources and get the facts.

Looking for reliable fact-based sources and decreasing engagement with fear-based sources. It is helpful to adopt a more analytical approach as you follow news reports about the coronavirus. You will also want to verify information that you receive from family, friends or social media.

A few options are:

Information/Facts:

- University of Regina COVID-19 information: www.uregina.ca/covid-19/
- Province of Saskatchewan COVID-19 information: www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus
- World Health Organization: www.who.int/
- The Government of Canada-Public Health: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html

Counseling and Support:

- *Employee and Family Assistance Plan:* <https://homeweb.ca/> Phone: 1-800-663-1142
- *Emergency/Crisis Support:*
 - *Mobile Crisis-306-757-0127*
 - *Crisis Line-306-585-5333*
 - *Canada Crisis Text Line-686868*

Additional Mental Health Resources:

- Canadian Mental Health Association: www.cmha.ca
- Mental Health Commission of Canada: <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English>

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