

TOLERATING UNCERTAINTY AND MANAGING ANXIETY DURING COVID-19

Uncertainty about COVID-19 can result in a number of emotions, including worry and stress. These are normal reactions. However, it's important that we learn to manage these feelings to limit the impact they have on our lives and the lives of those around us. People can often use alcohol and other drugs as a way to cope with stress and anxiety.

If you are experiencing stress and/or anxiety it is important to have strategies to help you cope, particularly through these uncertain times. This factsheet will provide you with information about some anxiety warning signs to be mindful of. It also includes some coping strategies for any stress you might be experiencing, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



If you're prone to anxiety, COVID-19 might have you feeling pretty distressed.

Most people feel anxious at one time or another in their lives. It's quite common to feel some level of anxiety in certain situations such as being in a competition, a performance review or a difficult personal conversation. Sometimes, anxiety can be helpful by making us more alert and focused, and encouraging us to perform at our best. However, anxiety is NOT helpful when it becomes intense or persistent and starts getting in the way of our daily lives. Anxiety can affect the things you feel, think and do. If you are supporting someone using alcohol and/or other drugs, you are probably experiencing heightened anxiety. You may even be impacted by that person's own stress. However, anxiety can be well managed if we are able to recognise and respond to its signs.

SIGNS OF ANXIETY:



BODY

Panic attacks, temperatures (hot or cold), muscle tension, aches or soreness, sleep disturbance, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, dizziness, sweating, nausea, diarrhoea, headaches, and being easily startled.



MIND

Excessive worrying that is difficult to control, trouble concentrating, irritability, tiring easily or feeling restless or 'on edge'.



BEHAVIOUR

Avoiding certain situations and using other behaviours to cope such as eating, drinking alcohol or using other drugs or watching more TV than usual.

WAYS TO COPE:

Stay healthy

Eating well, sleeping well and staying active can help you manage the signs of anxiety. It is important to ensure you are giving your body the nutrients it needs. This can help you sleep better, maintain your energy, and give you a greater sense of wellbeing.

- **Keep a well-balanced diet** and try to limit foods high in sugar and saturated fats. More information about maintaining a healthy diet can be found by clicking [here](#).
- **Keeping your body moving.** Limiting the amount of time you spend sitting is beneficial for both your physical and mental health. Moving more can help to improve sleep and stress levels and is a good way to distract you from your worries. Consider adding stretching, walking, yoga, or strength exercises to your day.



Limit caffeine

Caffeine is a nervous system stimulant, so it can produce similar symptoms to anxiety. This also means that if you are feeling anxious, adding caffeine can make the experience of these feelings worse. Caffeine is found in coffee, most teas, cola, and chocolate. It is important to avoid caffeine and alcohol or other drugs, as these can make symptoms of anxiety and depression worse.

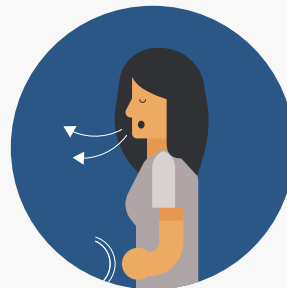


Practice relaxation/mindfulness

Common symptoms of anxiety include muscle tension, racing thoughts, and uneven or rapid breathing. Practicing relaxation can help reduce these symptoms. There are many ways to practice relaxation, including mindfulness activities, breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, and muscle relaxation. These activities help focus your attention, awareness, and breathing which can help with relaxation and stress reduction.

One example is a diaphragmatic breathing exercise. By concentrating on slow, deep breathing, you can distract yourself from unpleasant thoughts or sensations. Find a quiet, comfortable place with minimal distractions and then follow these steps:

1. Take one normal breath.
2. Now try a deep breath (in through your nose until your chest and stomach rise).
3. Allow your belly to fully expand, and then exhale slowly. Repeat as needed.



It might also be helpful for you to do a '3, 2, 1' mindfulness exercise when feeling anxious. This activity gets you to think about, and focus on:

3 things you can see

2 things you can hear

1 things you can feel



Stay connected

Staying connected is important for coping and improving mental health. Ensure you are communicating with your family and friends. Social distancing and staying at home can make it difficult to stay connected with others. If you are feeling isolated, there are online support forums where you can talk to others, like **Beyond Blue**.




Photo by Ekaterina Bolovtsova from Pexels

IF THIS HAS RAISED ANY CONCERNS, PLEASE CONTACT ONE OF THE SERVICES BELOW:


This factsheet has included a list of services and resources to support you. Seek professional help if you are feeling overwhelmed or as though you cannot cope.

Lifeline

 13 11 14

 www.lifeline.org.au

National Alcohol and Other Drug Information Service

 1800 250 015

For more evidence-based information, resources and links to support services relating to crystal methamphetamine please visit Cracks in the Ice. The Family and Friends Support Program also provides more information/resources and support for families concerned about a loved ones AOD use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES VISIT CRACKS IN THE ICE AND/OR THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT PROGRAM