

COVID-19: Managing Stress & Anxiety During Uncertain Times

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Symptoms of anxiety

- **Physical:**

- Muscle tension.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating.
- Increased heart rate.
- Restlessness.
- Trembling.
- Gastrointestinal problems.

- **Mental:**

- Trouble concentrating.
- Imagining worst-case scenarios.
- Replaying certain memories/thoughts.

- **Behavioral:**

- Avoiding things that trigger anxiety.
- Isolation.



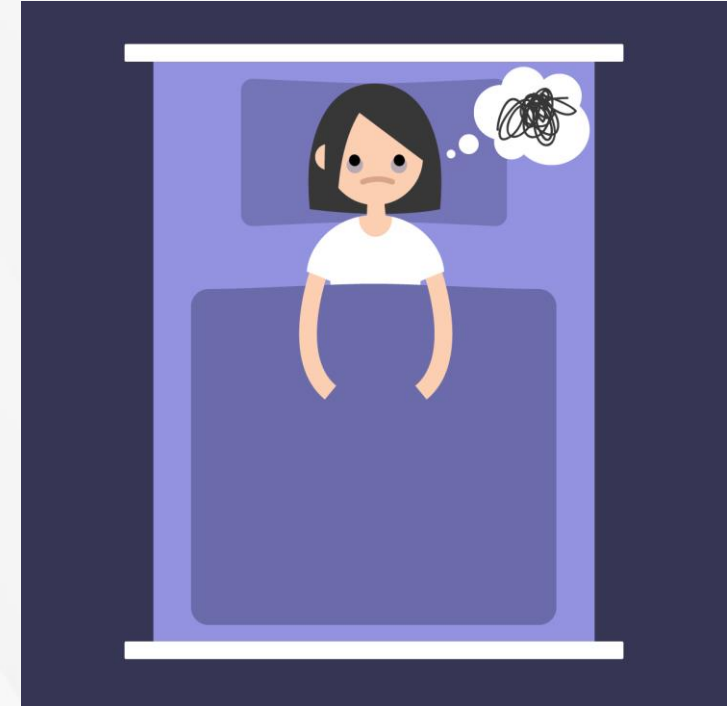
Statistics

- **1 in 5 Americans say they have had a physical reaction when thinking about the outbreak.**
- **Common identified symptoms from the study included:**
 - Feeling hopeless about the future.
 - Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge.
 - Trouble sleeping.
 - Depression.
 - Loneliness.
 - Loneliness vs. isolation.



Structure & consistency

- **When we experience a lack of structure or consistency it can cause a great deal of distress.**
- **COVID-19 has created a system of unknowns, with new information happening daily.**
- **Single incident vs. chronic anxiety:**
 - If we have to give a speech, for example, we might have some short-term anxiety about it, but it will generally dissipate once it's over.
 - When there is a long-term anxiety trigger such as COVID-19, this creates chronic anxiety (basically we're always in a heightened state).



Grief & loss

- **Part of what many people are also experiencing is grief.**
- **We can feel grief about many things:**
 - Death.
 - Job loss.
 - Planned events, trips, etc. that were cancelled.
 - Major life changes.
- **Social isolation can make coping with grief even more difficult.**



Work & home adjustments



- Office culture changes.
- Role adjustments.
- Inability to separate work and life.
- Single vs. multi-person households.

Unique challenges for HR

- Workplace safety guidelines.
- Increased employee questions, concerns, etc.
- Balancing empathy and compassion with maintaining a functioning workplace.
- Managing your own stress and anxiety while also supporting employees.

S O C I A L D I S T A N C I N G



What are my thoughts and feelings about COVID-19?

- Although the general symptoms of anxiety are universal, they can manifest in unique ways for different people.
- Take time to consider what is coming up for you regarding COVID-19 anxiety (mentally, physically, behaviorally).
- It can be a little easier to find ways to cope when you can narrow down some of your unique symptoms and their triggers.



It's normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Distress tolerance

Questions to ask yourself:

- What is my body trying to tell me?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how _____ do I feel?
- What would happen if I didn't give in to these feelings and chose to sit down for 5 minutes and accept the discomfort?
- Is there another way to look at this situation to gain a more realistic perspective?
- If I react now, will I be using my rational mind or my impulsive, irrational mind?
- Can I close my eyes and practice slow, deep-breathing until I feel calmer?

Decisional balance

	PROS	CONS
CHANGE		
NO CHANGE		

Allow & release the emotion.

- Notice & allow your thoughts.
- Release judgments of and struggles with thoughts.
- Breathe deeply.

Investigate the emotion.

- How intense is it?
- How are you breathing?
- What are you feeling physically?

5. Allow & Release

4. Investigate

3. Accept

Accept the emotion.

1. Notice

Notice how you feel.

2. Name

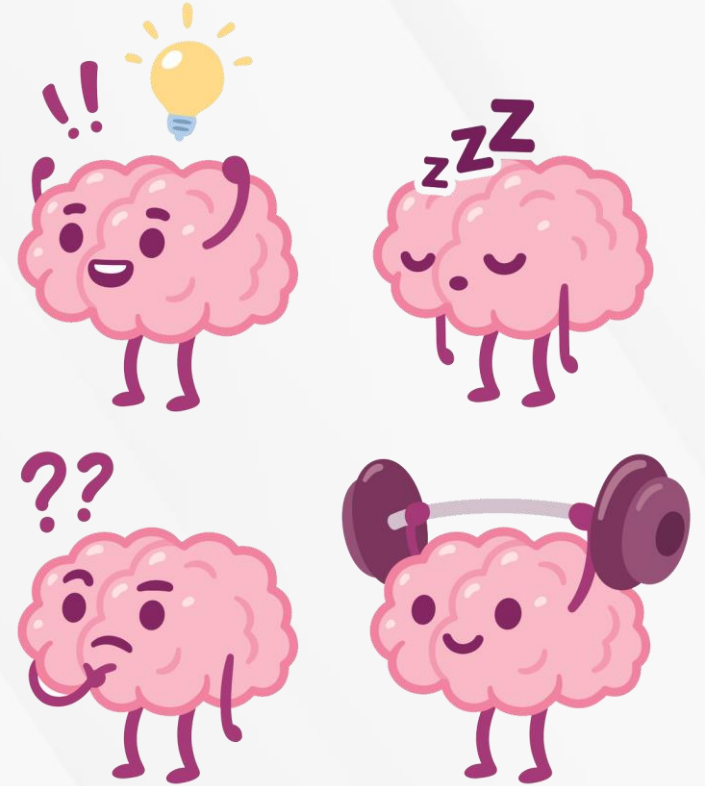
Name the emotion.

- What is it?
- What word best describes it?

- It's a normal reaction.
- What prompted it?
- Don't judge or condone just let it be for now.

Reframing thoughts

- **Cognitive reframing**: changing the way you perceive something and, thus, changing your experience of it.
 - Identify your thinking patterns.
 - Interrupt problematic thinking patterns by noticing them and then challenging them.
 - Introduce healthier thinking patterns.
- **Work on changing your relationship with discomfort, not eliminating it.**



“My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened”

Michel de Montaigne

Resilience & vulnerability

- Brene Brown defines vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure.”
- Using social supports requires us to be vulnerable.
- Resiliency does NOT mean handling challenges alone or suppressing emotions.



When you're anxious about a pandemic

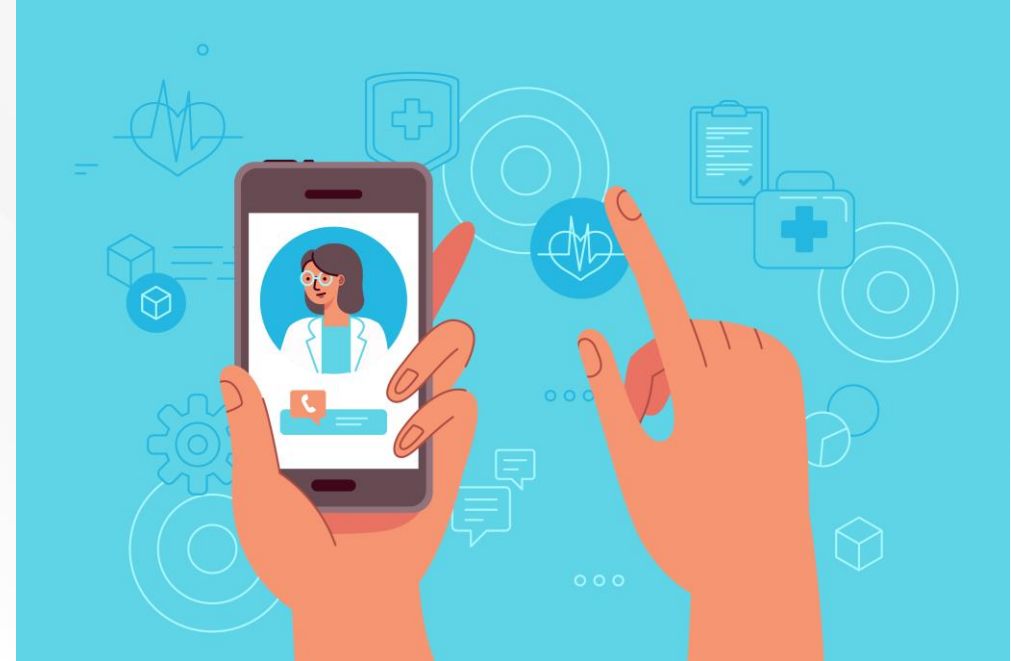
- Make sure to get your information from reliable sources.
- Limit access to media to prevent feeling overwhelmed.
- Focus on what you *can* control.
- Know it's normal to feel concerned and anxious.
- Give your thought patterns a 'reality check'.
- Try to remain in the present moment.
- Eat healthy.
- Seek support/stay connected to loved ones.
- Practice proactive self-care.



Utilize resources

- **Pay attention if:**

- Your anxiety is impacting your ability to function during work or daily tasks.
- Your coping skills begin to fail you when stressed or anxious.
- Remember that mental health services are available even during social isolation.



In summary

- No one has all the answers.
- The only way to support others is to practice your own self-care.
- Seek out resources when needed.
- Ask yourself: *“If I was suddenly less anxious tomorrow, how would my day look different?”*



Questions?