

Coping with COVID-19

Community Mental Health Associates, LLC

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"Anxiety suppresses the immune system," says Jane Timmons-Mitchell, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland. "So anything we can do to not be anxious is helpful." These ideas from the experts may help keep your anxiety under control.

1. Limit excessive news consumption

It's important to know the facts and what you can do to protect yourself and to take all precautions — but it's not going to help stress levels to obsessively watch the news.

The biggest source of anxiety is uncertainty; not knowing what's going to happen, when it's going to happen, how long this is going to last. And we don't know. So, trying to know, trying to resolve that uncertainty, is counterproductive. It's going to make you more anxious.

2. Practice calming techniques

Different people relax in different ways, but if you feel particularly anxious you might try deep breathing, taking a warm bath, or sitting with your pet, says Neda Gould, assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Johns Hopkins Medical School. "Alternatively, try mindfulness: bringing attention to the experience and allowing it to be there, and not judging it and knowing that it will pass." If you need mindful or meditative guidance, try free apps such as Calm; Breathe; UCLA Mindful, an app developed by the University of California, Los Angeles, Mindful Awareness Research Center.

3. Move your body

If people are able to just do a little bit of exercise, just some sit-ups or stretch — just to calm the tension in your body," it will help. *If you calm the tension in your body, you calm the tension in your mind.*

4. Connect with loved ones

Call, email or videochat with family members, especially if you are feeling isolated or you know that they are. You may find that they have more time to talk than they usually do because so

many people are home from school and work. There might be some grandchildren that you don't get to communicate with a lot, but now maybe they could because those people aren't as busy.

5. Listen to music, find activities that bring joy

With symphonies, opera houses, ballets and theaters shutting down or losing their audiences to quarantine measures, many are bringing their offerings online: The Berlin Philharmonic, for instance, gave a free livestreamed concert on March 12, while playing to an empty concert hall; it's offering free access to its archived concerts through March 31. The Philadelphia Orchestra is offering its recent live performance of “BeethovenNOW: Symphonies 5 & 6” online, as well. Watching a concert like that is going to help somebody feel better, and probably less anxious.

6. Get stuff done

Tackle a hobby you've wanted to explore, or a project you never seem to have time for. Maybe you have some watercolor painting supplies in a closet, or a big box of old photos that you've been meaning to transform into a keepsake album. Accomplishing tasks such as cleaning clothes closets or garages can be rewarding, while diverting your attention from anxious thoughts.

7. Find ways to laugh

Humor is a wonderful coping mechanism in times of crisis. Turn to sources you find funny, whether they're movies or TV shows, or certain friends whom you know will brighten your mood.

***If you feel like depression/anxiety is getting extreme, interfering with your daily functioning, for example, ask us for help. Text your first name to 31996 and receive a call from our office personnel. Book a video session at cmhahelps.com or email scheduling@cmhahelps.com

If you are feeling unsafe, call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255