Coping with Anxiety and Staying Mentally Well During Coronavirus

**Take care of your body** - During a crisis, you can easily forget to take care of yourself while only focusing on negative thoughts. Your first priority, however, should be making sure you’re taking self-care seriously. Try to eat healthy well-balanced meals, drink enough water exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (even caffeine). If you had trouble with these before, focus on them now. Make this part of your routine or schedule. You can use YouTube for workout routines, Yoga instructions, or Tai Chi. Additionally, this is a great time to go for walks outside. If walking outside sounds unpleasant, talk on the phone while doing so.

**Connect with others** - Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships and build a strong support system. Even during social distancing, there is an opportunity to deepen our relationships with the people in our household and beyond. Start a family book club or watch Harry Potter movies together. When else will you all be home to do that? What about a virtual happy hour with mocktails or a game night.

**Take breaks** - Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Try taking in deep breaths. Try to do activities you usually enjoy. Schedule breaks in while working from home.

**Stay informed but avoid too much exposure to the news** - When you feel that you are missing information, you may become more stressed or nervous. Watch, listen to, or read the news for updates from officials. Be aware that there may be rumors during a crisis, especially on social media. Always check your sources and turn to reliable sources of information like your local government authorities. Choosing only certain credible websites (who.int or cdc.gov is a good start) for a limited amount of time each day (perhaps two chunks of 30 minutes each) will be in your best interest during this time. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do enjoyable activities and return to normal life as much as possible and check for updates between breaks.
Seek help when needed - Find an online counselor, or contact the SAMHSA helpline at 1-800-985-5990. There are free online counseling options available.

Use this as an opportunity - Reframe “I am stuck inside” to “I can finally focus on my home and myself”. As dismal as the world may feel right now, think of the mandated work-from-home policy as an opportunity to refocus your attention from the external to the internal. Doing one productive thing per day can lead to a more positive attitude. Set your sights on long-avoided tasks, reorganize, or create something you’ve always wanted to. Approaching this time with a mindset of feeling trapped or stuck will only stress you out more. This is your chance to slow down and focus on yourself. With this newfound time, why not do something special during these quarantined days? For example, perhaps you can start a daily journal to jot down thoughts and feelings to reflect on later. Or take a walk every day at 4pm, connect with your sister over FaceTime every morning, or start a watercolor painting which you can add to everyday. Having something special during this time will help you look forward to each new day. The time also offers an unexpected chance to check in with yourself. I think that this is an opportunity for slowing down and reflecting on life. What brings you meaning when the noise of modern life quiets down? Have your priorities reflected what truly matters to you? As the usual pursuits of status and money are put on hold, where do you find your life purpose and transcendence?

Maintain a routine - Try and maintain some semblance of structure from the pre-quarantine days. As you work from home, it could be tempting to fall into a more lethargic lifestyle, which could lead to negative thinking. Wake up and go to bed around the same time, eat meals, shower, adapt your exercise regimen, and get out of your PJ’s. Do laundry on Sundays as usual. Not only will sticking to your normal routine keep you active and less likely to spiral, it will be easier to readjust to the outside world when it’s time to get back to work. Try actually scheduling out your day, hour by hour, including the more enjoyable aspects of life, instead of constantly trying to figure out what to do next. Instead of allotting “free time”, make evening plans just like you would for going out.

Take control where you can - With all the uncertainly happening outside your home, keep the inside organized, predictable and clean. Setting up mental zones for daily activities can be helpful to organize your day. For
example, try not to eat in bed or work on the sofa- just as before, eat at the kitchen table and work at your desk. Loosening these boundaries just muddles your routine and can make the day feel very long. Additionally, a cluttered home can cause you to become uneasy and claustrophobic of your environment- so keep it tidy. For the things you are worrying about, take some time to think about them objectively, make any plans you can and then move on not letting yourself dwell once plans have been made. Jot down your worst fears about the future and addressing them one-by-one, possibly even discussing them with someone you trust who is calm. This can help you form strategies for how to deal with each one realistically. What you don’t want to do is get stuck in that mode where you’re just thinking and thinking about the worst possible outcome. We can work ourselves up to where it’s almost like that actually happens. Planning for the future is great—it’s panicking that will hurt your mental health.

**Accept negative emotions** - It is important to acknowledge that a lot of anxious thoughts and emotions will show up during this time, and to accept them rather than trying to push them away or escape them. Avoidance of such emotions can often only make them stronger and longer-lasting. Notice negative emotions, thoughts and physical sensations as they come up, look into them with curiosity, describe them without judgment and then let them go. This is an essence of mindfulness, which has been consistently linked to good psychological health. You can try to reflect, relate and reframe where you name the emotion you are feeling, relate the feeling to why you are feeling it and reframe it in a better way. So recognizing that I am anxious, because things are out of my control, and realizing there are always things inside and outside of my control. Or you can try FLARE, Feel, Label, Allow, Respond, Expand where you feel the emotion, label it, allow yourself to feel it, respond in a productive way then return to focusing on your whole experience and surroundings. Full-on panic in times of distress is unproductive, but a small dose of fear or anxiety can actually be helpful. These emotions, however unpleasant, motivate us to prepare for and protect ourselves against potentially dangerous situations.

**Practice Deep Breathing** - Breathe deep, in through the nose out through the mouth, let you diaphragm expand. Try breathing in for 4 seconds, holding for 6 seconds, then breathing out for 7 seconds. You can also follow along a YouTube video for the 4-6-7 technique.
Be mindful - Be present and engaged in your activities. Be present for the cup of coffee you’re drinking instead of multitasking. Eat slower and notice how much you enjoy the food you’ve chosen at this moment. When you’re on the phone with a friend, relax on the couch and know that your only job is to connect. Try the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, mindful practice by identifying 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. Take your time and focus on each one.

Try meditating - Such as Grounding Tree Meditation on YouTube or another guided imagery meditation. Imagining a comforting place and all the details (like the beach) is another option. Or imagine all the details of your dream house. Get very specific and close your eyes and imagine yourself there walking through and seeing the details.

Check in with yourself - Continue to take stock of how you feel as you try these things. Do you feel worse after binging Netflix or better? What things are hard? What things could be better? Adjust your self care as needed as long as you don’t get rid of things that keep you healthy but temporarily are hard (eating, sleeping, etc). We all have different needs.

Prioritize - If you find life overwhelming, cut out any non-priorities. Sometimes this may require asking for help and that is okay.

Know that your feelings are normal and valid, and that it’s OK to feel whatever you’re feeling. Remind yourself that what’s going on is temporary and try to find comfort in knowing that we are all going through these tough times of uncertainty together. Say to yourself ‘Today, I’m giving myself a wider margin of error. I’m going to allow myself to do what I can to go with the flow,’ Or, ‘Saving energy is today’s version of productivity.’