

## **Dealing with Coronavirus Anxiety**

### **Feeling anxious about Coronavirus**

It is normal to feel anxious when we feel there is a threat to our lives such as the Coronavirus. Some people experience anxiety when actual threat is not there; but the worry of something bad happening takes over our rational thinking.

We often help people manage their anxiety by asking them to focus on the facts and to rationalise their fears. This can be difficult to do; especially when there is a global pandemic of Coronavirus and we hear about the dangers this virus brings.

Anxiety can be a helpful emotion to have during these times as it helps change our behaviours into healthy ones. For example; if I am anxious about the Coronavirus then I might be extra careful and ensure I follow the Government guidelines about washing hands, social distancing and staying at home. This is a healthy behaviour and will help to keep everyone safe.

At other times anxiety can be disabling and contribute to catastrophic thinking such as “I am going to die”. You may feel your anxiety levels increase as the days if not hours pass by. Staying at home and not mixing with others can feel very restrictive and further increase those anxious thoughts.

### **What do I need to know?**

#### **Awareness of Body Sensations**

Anxiety is an important emotion to have. It is an automatic response to danger.

For example;

When we hear a dog growling our brain thinks “I’m in danger” and sends signals to the body to prepare for a threat. This is known as the Fight, Flight or Freeze response.

The body then starts to prepare physically by pumping more oxygen to the blood and muscles to prepare it to either fight (push the dog away) or flight (run as fast as you can).

In doing this we may experience physical changes in the body, such as:

- Increased heart rate,
- Breathing fast
- Increased sweating

This can then be a problem when we worry about things that don't require a physical reaction, such as worrying about the Coronavirus, as the brain will still send signals to the body to prepare it as described above.

Often these signs of anxiety can be similar to those of Coronavirus- including:

- Shortness of breath
- Feeling flushed
- Tightness in chest

Keep this in mind if you are anxious about Coronavirus and experience any of these.

However if you think you might have Coronavirus please ensure you still follow the guidelines outlined by the NHS & call "111" for advice.

## What can I do to help manage my anxiety?

### Controlled Breathing

Controlled breathing is a technique commonly used that may help to manage some of these unpleasant feelings of anxiety. This technique can be used anywhere and at any time.

Simple Steps:

- Breathe in whilst counting for four seconds 1... 2... 3... 4...
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds 1... 2...
- Breathe out for four seconds 1... 2... 3... 4...
- Wait four seconds and then repeat

## Simple tips to help reduce anxiety levels

### **Set new routines for the day**

- Set the alarm clock to get up for a set time
- Get washed and dressed; do not stay in your pyjamas
- Have set times for your meals such as Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner
- Plan activities between these meal times
- Establish a routine at night and stay off electronic devices before going to bed

### **Distraction**

- Try to change your focus onto other tasks/topics
- Write down some tasks you would like to do such as tidying out that cupboard, weeding the garden etc...
- Start watching a new series/film (that is not anxiety provoking)
- Complete a puzzle and/or read a book.

### **Limit Social Media**

Limit your Social Media use. Try and reduce the number of stories you read about Coronavirus. Check in with the local news reports but limit how much time you spend listening to them. If you feel you need updated information then focus on the positive elements such as how many have survived from this virus.

### **Positive Focus**

Focus on how you feel now- You are fit and healthy and this shouldn't change if you follow the guidelines outlined by the Government and NHS.

### **Sleeping**

Quality of sleep is linked strongly to your emotional well-being. Therefore it is important to focus on ensuring you try to get a good nights sleep! The following is a list of practical things to do:

- Try and exercise during the day (but not too late at night)
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day (even at the weekend)
- Avoid Caffeine, alcohol and big meals before going to bed.
- Establish a night time routine such as taking a bath, brushing teeth, or getting pyjamas on (aim to do this around the same time every night)
- Attempt to do something relaxing at night time e.g. reading a book, taking a bath, meditation.
- Keep your bedroom as clear as possible (especially no gadgets) and cool (open up a window during the day).
- Try to stay of your gadgets at nights (such as mobile phone, tablet, gaming device) at least one hour before going to bed.

### **Urgent Care**

If you have ongoing concerns about your mental health- please contact your GP or out of hours service so they can offer help and support.