4 Reminders to Help You Manage Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Managing Anxiety During COVID

Managing your day-to-day activities can become overwhelming in the midst of a pandemic, especially if you are already dealing with an anxiety disorder. There are certain guidelines that you can follow in order to best support your own mental health during this troubling time. In this article we cover how to go about managing anxiety during COVID.

Mental Health Rates During the Pandemic

New studies out of the U.S. have shown that Google searches for terms like “worry” and “anxiety” have increased during the pandemic, as have searches related to techniques used to manage worry and anxiety. With cases and death rates increasing globally each day, it can be difficult (if not impossible) to avoid such feelings.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, researchers have warned that the mental health of many was worsening, including those both with and without pre-existing mental health issues. By analyzing Google search requests, researchers have witnessed an increase in the number of people searching for online therapy options, especially therapy techniques for dealing with anxiety symptoms.

Other research has shown relatively high symptoms of the following, as reported within the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic in China, Spain, Italy, Iran, the U.S., Turkey, Nepal, and Denmark:

- **Anxiety:** 6.33% to 50.9%
- **Depression:** 14.6% to 48.3%
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder:** 7% to 53.8%
- **Psychological distress:** 34.43% to 38%
- **Stress:** 8.1% to 81.9%

The following risk factors have also been associated with distress measures:

- Female gender
- Younger age group (below 40 years old)
- Presence of chronic/psychiatric illnesses
- Unemployment
- Student status
- Frequent exposure to social media/news concerning COVID-19

How a Global Pandemic Can Trigger Anxiety

We are in the midst of a worldwide pandemic in which many locations have either been shut down or have struggled to reopen, often with cases and infection rates getting worse, despite the safety measures that many local governments and health organizations have put in place.

For most individuals, it is the uncertainty of it all that is triggering their anxiety. It is difficult to handle a world in which we don't know what is going to happen next, how bad things might become, or when this pandemic will finally come to an end.

When Anxiety Becomes an Issue due to COVID

Especially when you are already managing an anxiety disorder, it can be difficult to deal with our current situation. With so much uncertainty in the world, it is hard to stay grounded.

As someone with anxiety, it is getting to easy to begin catastrophizing and panicking over all of the things that I don't have any control over, especially during a pandemic, when I feel more powerless than ever before.

There is an overwhelming amount of news concerning the coronavirus pandemic being released on a daily basis, and it is impossible to stay on top of it all. The constant barrage of COVID-19 coverage can feed your fears and fuel your anxiety if you are not careful with how and what you choose to read or watch.

There are a few different techniques that you can try, in order to manage your anxiety, while staying informed.

Anxiety Management During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Despite how uncertain everything is right now, there are useful ways to manage your anxiety and fears surrounding the pandemic, without completely cutting yourself off from the outside world.

1. Focus on Things You Can Control

In a world where so much is currently out of our control, focus on the little things that you can do to keep yourself and others safe, while maintaining a sense of normalcy in your daily life. Some of these things include, but are not limited to:

- Washing your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water throughout the day
- Using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, when handwashing is not possible
- Avoiding touching your face
- Staying home as much as possible (even if you don't feel sick) to avoid exposure
- Wearing a mask covering your nose and mouth when outside of your home
- Avoiding crowds and gatherings of any kind
- Avoiding non-essential shopping and travel
- Keeping 6 feet between yourself and others
- Scheduling each day, so you know what you'd like to accomplish and maintain as a routine
- Maintaining a sleep schedule, to improve the quality of your sleep and ensure you're getting enough

2. Stay Informed, Without Becoming Overwhelmed

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of news available from around the world concerning the coronavirus pandemic. In order to keep yourself and others safe, it is important to stay informed on what is going on in your community, but be sure to limit your daily intake of news.

With so much misinformation being spread, make sure you are consulting reputable sources on how to stay protected, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as your local public health unit.

Remember that if you do begin to feel overwhelmed, walk away and take a break. Limiting your news

consumption to a specific amount of time per day (like one hour or even just 30 minutes) can be very helpful.

3. Work on Your Connections

As the pandemic has encouraged social distancing, you may feel cut off from your family, friends and other important relationships in your life, which can have a negative impact on your mental health. This is why it is important to maintain the connections that you do have, even if it looks a bit different than it used to.

If you find yourself withdrawing from others due to anxiety, consider scheduling times to talk with loved ones on the phone or using a video-conferencing platform. Face-to-face interactions (even if virtual) actually help to ease stress and anxiety.

Use social media wisely, as a tool to remain connected to those you care about. If you are becoming overwhelmed by news coverage or false information being spread, consider blocking or removing negative influences from your social media platforms.

4. Be Gentle With Yourself

This is a difficult time for everyone, let alone those who were already dealing with anxiety disorders before the pandemic began. Make sure to carve time out of each day to practice self-care and relax.

You are not alone in this, but that can be easy to forget when all of us have been forced into self-isolation and socially distanced for so long. If you feel that you can no longer manage your anxiety on your own, contact your primary care physician to discuss medication and therapy options available.