

## UNCERTAINTY AND CORONAVIRUS



The rapid onset of the coronavirus is changing our work and our lives. Most of us are unsure when all this is going to end, what the future holds for us and our loved ones. Some of us have seen our work patterns changing rapidly. Our everyday lives, including daily routines, such as shopping, getting out of the house, exercising and socialising are rapidly changing every day.

Coronavirus crisis seems to be threatening fundamental assumptions about the world, our lives and ourselves. What happens if we thought we had everything planned, thinking of ourselves and our loved ones as strong or omnipotent? If we were planning to be promoted, have a holiday or spend some time with our elderly grandparents?

Last week's events seem to have impacted our beliefs about 'survival' and control of our lives and our environments. Some researchers had suggested that many of us hold assumptions that we are invulnerable and immortal. Many people see the world as a fairly stable, safe and predictable place. These assumptions are shattered during times like these. Some of us might be feeling unsettled, confused or even numb. From a psychological perspective, this is the result of our deeply held beliefs about ourselves, the world and the future being violated. For many of us it might be difficult to make sense of what is happening. Others might react with denial or refusal to accept there is a threat.

The personal meaning we attach to this crisis can have an impact on how we react to it and how we feel during this difficult time. Research says that those who employ coping strategies are more likely to feel in control of themselves and their environments.

Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust, Trust Headquarters, 350 Euston Road, Regent's Place, London NW1 3AX  
Telephone: 020 3214 5700 [www.cnwl.nhs.uk](http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk)

In order to help you deal with all these potentially overwhelming feelings, in this leaflet we have gathered some tips that have been found to be useful for any situation you might struggle with a sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

## **BE KIND TO YOURSELF**

The coronavirus situation can be scary because there is so much about it that's unknown and uncertain. First recognise it is normal to be anxious about coronavirus. The situation is making many people fearful and uncertain, so you're not alone.

Allow yourself to feel anxious and realise that your anxiety might not go away while the situation is still unfolding.

If you're experiencing an increase in your anxiety or other unpleasant emotions, it's not your fault! Do what you can to keep being productive and healthy without trying to be perfect.

## **CUT BACK ON CONSTANT NEWS CHECKING**

We recognise it can be difficult not to check the news about Coronavirus and how it is developing.

However, it might be more helpful to restrict your news intake to a frequency and duration that works for you.

For example, you might only check once a day for a maximum of five minutes, or once a week. You might watch the evening news, or you might decide not to check news at all.

Find out what works better for you.

## **TRY BREATHING EXERCISES**

Breathing exercises can help you cope and feel more in control. Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer.

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.

- Count as you breathe. Start by counting 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe in and 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe out. Try to work out what's comfortable for you.

You can find some suggestions on the NHS Choices website (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/>).

Mindfulness apps (e.g. 'Headspace', 'Let's Meditate', Calm etc.) can provide useful tips and guidance on ways to keep yourself in the present and stop worrying about the uncertainty the future can hold.

'Headspace' is currently offering free access to guided meditation exercises for coronavirus anxiety.

## **TALK TO SOMEONE**

Talking to someone you trust about what is making you anxious could help. . Research has shown that having someone listen to you and show they care can help in itself. If you find it difficult to open up to your friends or colleagues, the Samaritans (<https://www.samaritans.org/>) and Anxiety UK (<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>) offer helplines that you can call to talk to someone.

## **HOW YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR UNCERTAINTY?**

We recognise it can be really hard to stop worrying during these difficult times. You might have thoughts you cannot control. Or you might think that you need to keep worrying because it helps you to be prepared for everything –bad things might happen if you stop.

Research says that these ideas can make you feel even worse, without significantly improving the situation you are in. It can be more useful to try different ways of addressing these worries.

For instance, you could:

- Set aside a specific time to focus on your worries – so you can reassure yourself you have not forgotten to think about them. Some people find it helps to set a timer. Others find it helpful to identify a particular time during the day to think about their worries (e.g. before bed).
- Write down your worries and keep them in a particular place – for example, you could write them in a notebook, or on pieces of paper you put them in an envelope or jar.

## **LOOK AFTER YOURSELF**

Make sure you don't forget to look after yourself! Get a good night's sleep, eat well and exercise.

If you manage your health like this it can make you more robust both against coronavirus and uncertainty!