



COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, has now been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization and governments around the world are taking far-reaching measures to prevent the virus from spreading – closing their borders and implementing large-scale bans on public gatherings. Anxiety among people is escalating as a consequence. When we see people responding with anxiety and fear, it is natural for us to do the same. A recent poll confirmed this, showing that almost 50% of Canadians are experiencing anxiety related to the COVID virus.

Below we offer some basic, evidence-based tips for people who feel that their anxiety is escalating or mood is declining as a consequence of the spread of the virus. Consistent with cognitive behavioural therapy, it is helpful to consider managing both **THINKING** and **BEHAVIOUR** in this time of uncertainty.

THINKING

As human beings, we do not like uncertainty, and we are trained to look out for fears. When we experience great stress, we tend to catastrophize, as a way to prepare ourselves for the future. The problem is that these thoughts are often not helpful. Such thoughts may include "*This is the end of the world as we know it*", "*Everyone will lose their jobs*" or "*I won't be able to cope if I get sick*". Although the virus will undoubtedly have negative consequences for many members of society, it is important to attempt to balance such thoughts in order to manage anxiety. If you find yourself having negative, unhelpful thoughts related to the virus, try the following suggestions:

- **Try to identify your thoughts by writing them down.** Ask yourself whether each thought is helpful or unhelpful.
- **Balance out excessively negative thoughts with facts.** For example, remind yourself that the overwhelming majority who contract the virus recover completely.
- **Ask yourself:** Have I been able to cope with flu, cold, or other illness in the past?
- **Ask yourself:** What would a trusted friend or family member say if they knew I had these thoughts?
- **Remember: the current situation is temporary.** Although no one knows how long the current situation will last, one thing is certain: eventually it will end. All infectious diseases tend to follow the same course: at first, there is skepticism, then there is attention, then comes panic, followed by reality and a return to normality.

BEHAVIOURS

Set limits around news intake, and unplug from social media as needed

Media is an important way to keep up to date with what is happening. However, in the past month, COVID coverage has been escalating from daily to hourly. In the past week, there have been updates almost every minute. Both social media and traditional media are bombarding us with new information. This coverage overloads us and we may not be getting any breaks from hearing about the virus. A way to deal with this overload is to regulate your media intake, both social and traditional media. Some tips to do this are:

- Set time limits for your media intake and take breaks
- Decide which specific media channels you will be following and stick to them
- Focus on accessing trusted sources such as the Government of Canada, BC Centre for Disease Control, WHO, CDC etc. where facts are presented in a balanced way

Contact your loved ones – but remember social distancing

Sometimes, the best way to handle anxiety is to break isolation and talk to other people. We are very fortunate to live in a time where digital communication is readily available for most of us. There is no need to stop talking to people because of the virus. If you feel the need to talk to someone, do not hesitate to reach out. Also, don't forget those older adults who are isolated in their home and who may appreciate social contact. There is an abundance of ways to communicate from a distance, either by phone or computer.

Focus on what you can do

A good way of dealing with stressful thoughts is to get active and do things. Instead of focusing on vague fears of what might happen in the coming weeks, months, and years, focus on the things that you can do today. Self-care and finding balance is key to remaining psychologically healthy. Follow recommendations for reducing spread of the virus (e.g., wash hands, don't touch face, appropriate social distancing, for more information visit <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>)

- Set a routine –even if you are at home
- Try to get good sleep. Maintain your normal sleep schedule by avoiding staying up late, sleeping in, or napping excessively. Reserve your bedroom for sleep and sex only. Avoid caffeine late in the day and exercise in morning or early afternoon when possible.
- Don't forget your nutrition and drink lots of water.
- Take activity breaks regularly.
- Generate a list of activities that you enjoy. Here are a few ideas from our team:

Catch up on books or magazines	Keep moving: Go out for a walk, stretch, create a home workout
Listen to music or play music	Meditate
Consider developing or working on a skill (e.g., computer programming, painting, singing, magic, juggling, taking photos with your phone)	Take the opportunity to spend time with those that you live with or reach out to family and friends online or by phone
Take a longer bath or shower	Organize, clean, bake, try a new recipe
Journal	Spend time with your pet or look at animals online
Draw	Listen to a podcast or watch a new show

FOR MORE HELP:

If you would like more support consider:

- 1) Sign up for the Wellbeing course: <https://www.onlinetherapyuser.ca/wellbeing-program>
- 2) Reviewing resources listed on our website <https://www.onlinetherapyuser.ca/resources>
- 3) Saskatchewan residents can call:
 - i. Mental Health Workers via [Healthline](#) for advice by calling **811** 24 hours a day.
 - ii. Saskatchewan Crisis Suicide Helpline, 24/7, **1-833-453-4566**
 - iii. Crisis Services Canada for advice by calling **1-833-456-4566**

FOR IMMEDIATE HELP:

- Call emergency services: **911** (Ambulance/Police/Fire Service)
- If able, go to the local hospital emergency department.

The following resources were used in the creation of this resource:

<https://www.uregina.ca/external/communications/feature-stories/current/2020/03-13.html>
https://mindspot.org.au/assets/pdf/10_Tips_for_Coping_with_Infectious_Diseases.pdf