

“Anxiety & the Coronavirus: Getting through these tough times”

Everybody reacts differently to trauma. Your genetic predisposition and the previous experiences you have had with trauma, will determine your reactions to and coping abilities concerning this new trauma. If you have a tendency towards anxiety, this situation will probably hit you harder than those who generally tend to worry less. What is important to realize is that it is normal to be scared by what is happening right now. It would indeed be unusual to be totally calm about the health situation in the world. But there is judicious fear and there is hysteria leading to inability to function. I want to talk about what to do to keep the fear from overwhelming you.

First of all, it is important to be informed. But we each need to decide how much information we want to take in. How much is helpful? How much is making us too scared to be able to function. And when we hear contradictory facts, we have to decide what to believe. My professional advice would be to listen to the authorities, talk to friends and relatives, and then find what works for you. Also find a new daily routine for yourself. Put in some work projects and some fun activities each day. Get to work on something productive you have been putting off because you have been too busy.....e.g. closets that need cleaning out? Personally, I wrote out a list of things I can still do, given all the cancellations in my environment. Find a new normal for the moment. Finding a routine is important, so that when you are feeling heightened anxiety, you have something to fall back on. There is no one perfect answer to any of this. You need to pick some ideas that work for you and try to stick with them as much as possible.

Some tried and true methods of dealing with any kind of anxiety will be helpful. Some tools will be more helpful than others given the specific nature of this problem. When someone asked my professional advice the other day, I realized that there were four coping elements that I was personally using for this crisis:

First of all, stay in the moment and figure out your plan for the day. Do not focus on the future and what may or may not happen. Most of us can figure out how to cope with one day. Do that today, and tomorrow you will do the same when that day arrives. Second of all, be sure to stay in touch with friends and relatives. Do not be afraid to reach out and ask for support. There are agencies and individuals all over town who are available to help you with any part of this situation which seems overwhelming. Third of all, remember a time in your life that you got through a past crisis or trauma. How did you do it? Remember that somehow you made it through, and you will make it through this one too. Fourth of all, if there is a thought or a behavior which you notice is worsening the problem for you, try to substitute another thought or another behavior. For example, if worrying about how you will keep busy for several months is upsetting (as it would be to many of us), substitute that thought with a plan for that day and begin working on that plan. If watching the news is making you more anxious, try skipping it for a day or two or forever if necessary. The important news will eventually catch your attention.

Your anxiety will ebb and flow as the days pass. Here are some tools that work with any kind of heightened anxiety state. Remind yourself to stay in the manageable present moment. It is easier to deal with what is actually happening in your world in the present moment than to think about all the “what ifs” of the future. Think about activities that could be distractions for you: e.g. watching funny “you tube” videos or favorite old movies could be useful. Listen to your

favorite music. Play with your pet. Figure out an exercise routine which will help you maintain your health and be a distraction. Try to stick to it on a daily basis if possible. If you miss one day, come back to it the next. When the weather permits, go outside and enjoy nature. The fresh air will feel good and looking at our surroundings will remind us how lucky we are to be living in such a wonderful area of the country. Even though we should not be in large gatherings, you can set up dates to get together with friends in their homes or your own. It is important to take precautions as far as being with other people, but each of us needs to make a personal decision about the physical benefits versus the emotional risks of being alone.

Remember that all feelings do eventually pass, even if the underlying origin of the feeling still exists. So even though this illness is still out there, our anxiety will continue to ebb and flow over the course of this situation. Know that heightened feelings do usually diminish. Also, acceptance of the feelings will help them pass faster than denying their reality. Remember that your anxiety is a physiological sensation, not a reality. If you actually do get the virus, the experts are saying that the symptoms will most likely be mild and your body will have developed its own immunity afterwards. It is important to remember that anxiety cannot hurt you, although it certainly feels like it can.

In the middle of an anxiety episode, try to slow your breathing down. You may consider starting a practice of meditation. If your anxiety persists and becomes unmanageable, call your physician and discuss the possibility of medication. There are also some supplements that are helpful and are not as detrimental to the body as some medications. Naturopathic doctors can be useful in finding the right supplements for you. Ask friends for recommendations of professionals they have used.

You might consider journaling to help identify problems and possible solutions and to have an outlet for your thoughts and feelings. Remember all the things in your life that have not changed and what you have to be grateful for. Remember that things will eventually return to the old normal and that this too shall pass.

And last, but far from least, there are professionals who are trained to help you get through these tough times. Do not be afraid to reach out for professional help.

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