

## **What Anxiety Does to the Body and What You Can do About it**

With everything going on in our world there is a lot of uncertainty. As humans we do not do well with uncertain situations. Our minds race to fill in the gaps of what we do not know in hopes of providing us with comfort and security. Our nervous system is built to constantly assess our environment for safety and/or danger. If our body senses a threat it will prepare to focus on it so we can act if needed. Normally this response is helpful because it is what keeps us alive and free from harm, but when the threat is something we can't immediately attack or flee from we get stuck in a heightened sense of anxiety. During this COVID-19 pandemic, where the threat is invisible, we are unsure of how long our daily lives are going to be disrupted, so it is only normal to be feeling high levels of anxiety. Without an outlet for this energy, our nervous system remains in a ramped-up state that can lead to irritability and agitation, which can lead to bad decisions. So, instead of panic buying or lashing out at others, what can we do about this? Here is a list of alternative ways to alleviate anxiety.

### **1. Find Safety in Social (distancing) Interactions**

Interacting with loved ones and people that make us happy can be one way of alleviating some anxious feelings. Right now, these interactions look a little different, but they do not have to be any less fulfilling. Engage with others over Skype, Zoom, phone or google hangouts. Start a virtual book club, a Zoom family chat, or a weekly online check in with friends. All these interactions will minimize feelings of isolation and some of the hypervigilance we are experiencing, resulting in feeling a lot calmer.

### **2. Empower Yourself**

If cleaning our house, using hand sanitizer, or staying organized allows us to take action and feel in control, then let's do those things. Things can currently feel very out of control and confusing, so we need to focus on the things we can control and ways to keep ourselves and our family safe. We can start a new routine that makes us feel good. Whether it's to try a new virtual work out before deciding to start our day, a new breathing technique to clear our mind, or just deciding on a new mantra for ourselves. These new empowering additions to the day can really give our mind a break when it needs it most.

### **3. Limit Time Online and Watching News**

Everyone wants to stay informed during this time and I am not suggesting this is wrong, but what we want to avoid is following poor sources down a path that leads to false information and more anxiety. We can combat this by getting our information only from sources we know are true. It might also be

helpful to designate what times during the day to check in for updates. Check in, then disconnect, so we can allow your nervous system a chance to calm back down.

#### **4. Actively Release the Tension**

We hold tension in our bodies sometimes without realizing it. Throughout the day, take time to tune into your body and actively release the muscles that are holding that tension. Some people hold stress in their face muscles, their jaws, the muscles in their neck, and shoulders. These are all muscles that are engaged when we are preparing for danger or threats. By telling our bodies to relax we are sending the message that we are safe and secure.

Remember that anxiety is a helpful response our bodies create to help us when we are in trouble. Let it do its job without working into overdrive. If you are experiencing levels of anxiety that you notice are interfering with your daily life, it might be a good idea to contact a professional for help. Therapy is a helpful tool that can provide support during difficult times.

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Reliable Sources:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Online Therapy resources:

<https://mentalhealthmatch.com/>

<https://www.betterhelp.com/>

<https://www.talkspace.com/>