10 things you can do right now to reduce anxiety, stress, worry related to COVID-19

1. Only read, watch or listen to news when you want to. That means turn off push notifications on your phone and set aside only an hour per day to stay informed from credible, balanced sources, such as the Canadian Public Health Association.

2. Considering the level of attention and seriousness being paid to the pandemic, it's normal to feel anxious. Try not to avoid, ignore or suppress anxious thoughts. Instead, be aware of your anxiety and accept that you're feeling anxious in this situation. Try to keep things in perspective; notice and challenge your thoughts that may be extreme or unhelpful.

3. While you can't be together physically, stay socially connected with friends and family by phone, text and video applications such as FaceTime, Skype or Zoom.

4. Do something good or helpful. Research shows that doing things for others strengthens our own mental health. Check on your neighbours, elderly parents and friends to see how they're doing and if they need help picking up groceries, medications and other important household items.

5. Stay connected with the outdoors. If you're not required to self-isolate for 14 days, consider going outdoors for a walk, run or bike ride to enjoy the scenery and fresh air. Be sure to stay two metres away from others and consider going out at off-peak hours (early morning, late evening) to avoid proximity.

6. Routines can help reduce mental fatigue, so getting up at your usual time, showering and getting dressed as you normally would for work can be helpful. Eating healthy, drinking water and getting plenty of sleep are also important factors.

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Continue to exercise or do the things you would typically do to support your health and be sure to use caution and follow health and safety guidelines while doing them. Instead of going to the gym, check out some exercise videos online. Housework, walking up and down stairs, and outdoor activities like raking leaves, cleaning the yard, or prepping the garden are also sources of physical activity.

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Practice mindfulness, meditation or yoga to help you stay grounded and focused when you begin to feel stress and worry in your body, like shortness of breath and tightening in the chest. Some ideas include keeping a gratitude journal, doding deep breathing exercises, or using grounding exercises to help you focus on things in the present so you feel safe.

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Take time to organize your home, such as your pantry, cupboards or closets, or do something you've been putting off for a while, such as sorting through your basement or garage for unwanted or recyclable items. Accomplishing such a task may reduce stress and anxiousness.

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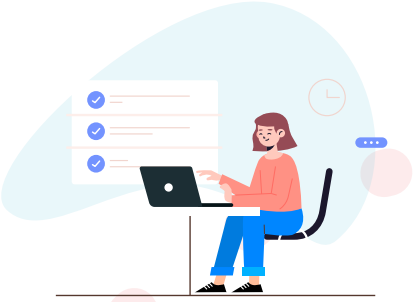
If you're noticing that your symptoms of anxiety (related to COVID-19 or otherwise) are causing you significant distress or are interfering with your ability to function normally, consider participating in CMHA's BounceBack program. BounceBack is a free skill-building program for adults and youth 15+ who want to gain practical life skills to help them better manage their symptoms of low mood, mild-to-moderate depression and anxiety, stress or worry. For more information or to see if the BounceBack program may be right for you, visit bouncebackontario.ca.



Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario

BounceBack® reclaim your health