



Metrocare

Top Ten Ways to Manage Anxiety in the time of the Coronavirus

Anxiety is a part of our normal internal anticipation and warning systems that prepares us to respond to dangers (real or perceived). We can have anxiety about a real challenge at work or about our teenager who is struggling in school. Anxiety can even be motivating like before a basketball game to get adrenaline pumping in anticipation of competition or even before happy events like having a baby or a wedding.

An anxiety disorder, in contrast, is a mental health illness involving the brain and adrenal glands that can substantially impact our daily functioning. As much as 20% of the population suffers from these common conditions. In these cases, anxiety can come up for no apparent reason, be stronger than expected compared to the likelihood of a problem occurring or feel like it is impossible to manage. In the absence of a pandemic, people may avoid everyday situations like going to the grocery store because the anxiety is so intense. Times like these compound that problem substantially.

During high stress situations or a crisis, when we do not know what the future holds and we are facing physical risks, like the Coronavirus Pandemic, anxiety can increase for any us, particularly those with an Anxiety Disorder. This becomes even more true when the crisis continues for days, weeks or months. In either case, in times of crisis or with a disorder, anxiety can be overwhelming.

What can you do? Pay attention to physical signs of anxiety: shallow breathing, increase heart rate, sweating, trembling, racing thoughts, or trouble concentrating. Then use these Top 10 steps that everyone can take to support themselves:

1. **Count your breaths or talk.** This helps deepen your breathing which physically helps your body and mind relax. Breathe in for 3 seconds, pause, and breathe out for 3 seconds. Slowly.
2. **Meditate** – it's easier than you think. Being in the present moment is critical for reducing anxiety rather than overfocusing on the future. There are a number of apps you can try for free to learn how. You can even get guided meditations for free on YouTube. **Progressive muscle relaxation** is especially useful to help deal with the physical repercussions. It's important to try meditation for 10 days to get the hang of it. Just 5 minutes is a good start.
3. **Get moving.** Good exercise 30 minutes a day is essential for a healthy lifestyle. But, also, you can simply get up and get moving. Take a walk around the block. Do a set of sit-ups or push-ups or high steps. Stretch. Do yoga or tai chi, both of which have a calming, meditative aspect to the practice. If you have not been active recently, take it slow with 5-10 minutes of exertion a few times a day. Fairly quickly, you will feel ready for more and your stress will be reduced.

4. **Get news from official sources.** With respect to a worldwide crisis, listen to the experts and from several sources so you do not have inaccurate information that could feed panic. Social media is full of opinions and false statements.
5. And, conversely, **Take media breaks.** Limit your news intake and social media input. Stay informed but don't overdose on news or Facebook. Utilize the other tips with that time instead.
6. **Increase your water intake.** Staying hydrated is good for your health and well-being. Taking time out to sip tea or water can also be meditative.
7. **Reduce your sugar and caffeine intake.** Eating healthfully goes without saying for all of us. But if you only do one or two things to improve your diet, reducing or cutting sugar or caffeine is one small step with big results.
8. **Practice small acts of courage.** If you are overwhelmed and feel stuck, pick one small thing that you can do and celebrate that accomplishment. Get a buddy to help you through it.
9. **Keep a diary.** Tracking your anxiety can help you see patterns of when anxiety may be more overwhelming than usual. It can also show you ways in which you might be exacerbating your anxiety and triggers that you can avoid. Writing also helps you get anxious thoughts out of your head and onto paper. Seeing the thoughts can help you challenge self-talk that may be inaccurate or not useful. You can even make a practice to mentally "let go" of your negative self-talk once they are written down.
10. **Connect with calm people.** Surround yourself with people who are also practicing these tips. Get an accountability partner and plan to check in each day with the steps you are taking to support yourselves.

Metrocare is here for Dallas. If you need to reach out to a professional because of your personal anxieties, that's what we do.

Here's the number for the Metrocare Coronavirus Support Line: It's 214-743-1215.

Metrocare's professionals will be available to you to counsel or perhaps direct you to other services that will be helpful in these times.

Taking care of our physical well-being – especially in times like these – means supporting our mental health and each other.