

Coping with Stress related to COVID19

Though we know that this will pass, right now we feel unsafe.

- We are worried about ourselves, others, and people we love
- This threat is also disrupting activities of daily life for some people

Understanding Anxiety

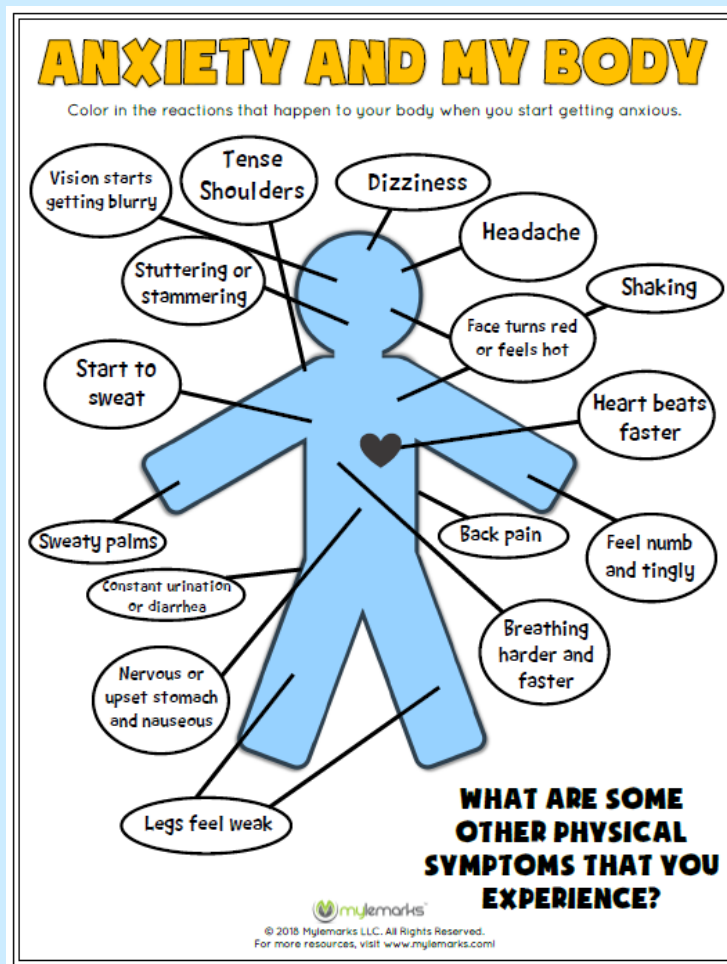
Anxiety is your body's *natural* response to stress It is a feeling of fear or apprehension about what you believe is to come.

Benefits to Anxiety

Anxiety can be helpful in keeping us safe, but sometimes it is too much. Anxiety can help us pay attention and change behavior when we need it.

Troubles with Anxiety

Anxiety can put a lot of stress on our mind and body.



How People Experience Anxiety

Anxiety feels different to different people.

- **Feelings of anxiety can range:** Butterflies, racing heart, restlessness, worried “what if” thoughts, feeling/thinking you are helpless to yourself or others you care about, feeling like you have no control, feeling like there is a disconnect between you and your body

Anxiety can make us go into **Fight, Flight, or Freeze** mode (survival mode).

- **Fight-** feeling irritable, tense jaw, tight muscles, unpleasant thoughts and communication with others
- **Flight-** feeling fidgety, avoiding things, very fearful
- **Freeze-** feeling a sense of dread, hoping for cancellations, having a hard time making decisions, feeling stiff, heavy, or distracted in a fog

Recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

- 1) Avoid excessive exposure to media.
 - a. Schedule a time to check the news, obtain news from reliable and diverse sources. If you feel overwhelmed, direct your attention away from the media.
2. Take care of your body.
 - a. Try to eat healthy meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep. YouTube has great free exercises and music for insomnia.
3. Make time to unwind and remind yourself that *strong feelings will fade*.
 - a. Connect with yourself and the people around you
 - b. Take on projects that you wish you had time for previously
 - c. Share your thoughts and concerns with friends and family members
 - d. Send your coworkers and loved ones supportive messages
4. Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking.
 - a. Write down the things that you are thankful for
 - b. Identify what makes you feel connected to the world, even if you can't be physically present
 - c. Identify your values! What are some of the reasons you do your work?

- i. Helping others, having meaning, caring, loving being a caregiver, loving your community and its people

Goal in Addressing Anxiety: Maintain Emotional Well Being and a Sense of Calm

We need to find a balance. To do this, there are many types of coping skills we can use.

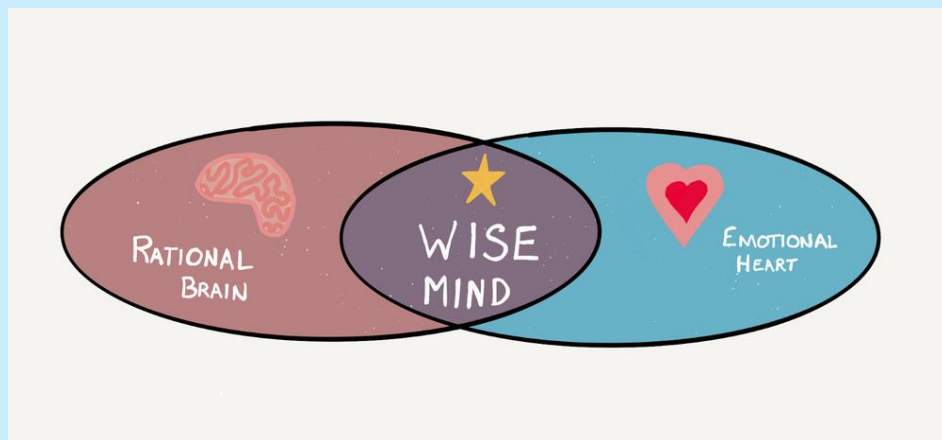
Coping Skills

- 1) **Health Behaviors.** We need to start with focusing on basic health behaviors.
 - a. Get as much good quality sleep as possible
 - b. Eat and drink nutritious food and drinks throughout the day when possible
 - c. Get some fresh air and daylight when possible
 - d. Maintain as normal a schedule and activities as possible. Creating a daily schedule is helpful for many people, even if you don't have as many responsibilities.
 - e. Use your social supports. Talk to friends, family, and people from the community. Though it is hard to stay connected in person, try to avoid isolating yourself from others.
- 2) **Be Mindful and Non-Judgmental.** (Buggy, 2020)
 - As Jon Kabat-Zinn stated, "*mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment.*"
 - *Non-judgment*, means letting go of the automatic judgments that arise in your mind with every experience you have.
 - "This is terrible, I don't want to do this, I am so annoyed!"
 - Setting down the judging mind, even for a short while, is a refreshing weight off of your shoulders.
 - In practicing non-judgment, there's no longer anything to be done about the present moment. No grasping for more, no resisting what's there, and no ignoring of life's experience.
 - When you stop trying to react to your experience, you can open up to it completely, resting in mindful presence.

3) Use your *Wise Mind*.

We have 3 states of mind:

- **Rational Mind**- This is the state of mind in which you think and act logically without many emotions involved.
- **Emotional Mind**- This is a state of mind in which emotions consume you and take over. Everything you think and do is driven by emotion
- **Wise Mind**- This is the ideal state of mind. It is a combination of using your emotions and logic together. This is when you are able to best think and cope in stressful situations.



4) Self-soothing with your senses.

- Vision**- Look at something pleasant, such as photos of a place or people you love or Google pictures of a beach or sunrise/sunset
- Hearing**- Listen to relaxing music or music that you enjoy
- Smell**- Smell a fresh cup of coffee, candle, or wear a favorite lotion
- Taste**- Eat and drink something you enjoy, such as a hot cup of coffee or tea or a meal
- Touch**- Touch or wear something soft and comfortable
- Movement**- Go for a walk, do stretches, do regular physical exercise when possible

5) **Do a Body Check.** When we are stressed, our body can become very tense. This can lead to aches and pains and headaches. Check your shoulders to see if they are tense and up high. Check your posture. Roll your shoulders, take a deep breath, and improve your posture. Do this several times per day.

6) **Use the ACCEPTS skill.**

- a. **Activities.** Do something to distract yourself for a few minutes (Stretch, music, reading, comedy, podcasts, *no media*).
 - b. **Contributing.** Contribute or do something like for somebody else.
 - c. **Compare.** Take a moment to reflect on how your life is different from those with far less than you have. During intense distress, it is easy to forget how much there is to be grateful for.
 - d. **Emotions.** Create different emotions. Watch a funny video, Facetime with someone you care about, practice breathing techniques.
 - e. **Pushing Away.** Push the painful situation out of your mind temporarily. Leave the situation mentally by moving your thoughts away. Build an imaginary wall or scenario between you and the stressful situation.
 - f. **Thoughts.** Replace your thoughts. Notice the colors of a picture, sing words to a song in your mind, go to your rational mind and stick around for a while.
 - g. **Sensations.** Intensify other sensations. Hold or chew ice, listen to loud (pleasant) music, squeeze a ball or a paper clip.
- 7) **Respond calmly.** Stay as calm as possible when you feel you are faced with something hard. Take a deep breath, use non-judgmental thinking, respond with your wise mind.
- 8) **Take some time to breathe.** Use diaphragmatic (belly) breathing. You can use apps to guide you (Kardia, Breethe, Headspace, Calm) or use meditation or nature sounds (YouTube, Spotify, Pandora, etc.).

• **Use Coping (Green) Thoughts.** These are thoughts that are realistic that help to get you through a situation

- This is temporary.
- Right now, I am safe. I am not alone.
- Strong feelings will fade.
- If something happens, I have a plan to get help or support.
- I am doing the best I can with what I have.

References

Crawford, D. & German, M. (2020). Anxiety & COVID19 [Video File]. Behavioral Health Integration Program & The Trauma Informed Care Program at Montefiore Medical Center. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/398138843/b4dc58fcf5?fbclid=IwAR3PuB7s1WmYA2SSfWoMpDdCBoV4Dcc3vwQHoSbx31Ohq5bayGT1KsLko2M>

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