

A background image showing the back of a woman's head with long dark hair, looking towards a television screen displaying a news broadcast.

Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety

As the number of coronavirus cases rise across Australia, the level of anxiety within the community is increasing.

Feelings of worry and unease can be expected following a stressful event, such as the recent declaration of a global pandemic, however, it is important that we learn to manage our stress before it turns to more severe anxiety and panic.

This information sheet outlines some useful strategies which can help both adults and children cope with the stress or anxiety experienced as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Learn the facts

Constant media coverage about the coronavirus can keep us in a heightened state of anxiety. Try to limit related media exposure and instead seek out factual information from reliable sources such as the Australian Government's [health alert](#) or other trusted organisations such as the [World Health Organization](#).

Keep things in perspective

When we are stressed, it is easy to see things as worse than they really are. Rather than imagining the worst-case scenario and worrying about it, ask yourself:

- *Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome?* Remind yourself that the actual number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in Australia is extremely low.
- *Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be?* Remember, illness due to coronavirus infection is usually mild and most people recover without needing specialised treatment.
- *Am I underestimating my ability to cope?* Sometimes thinking about how you would cope, even if the worst were to happen, can help you put things into perspective.

Take reasonable precautions

Being proactive by following basic hygiene principles can keep your anxiety at bay. The World Health Organization recommends a number of protective measures against the coronavirus, including to:

- wash your hands frequently
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- stay at home if you begin to feel unwell until you fully recover
- seek medical care early if you have a fever, cough or experience breathing difficulties.

Practise self-care

To help encourage a positive frame of mind, it is important to look after yourself. Everybody practises self-care differently with some examples including:

- maintaining good social connections and communicating openly with family and friends
- making time for activities and hobbies you enjoy
- keeping up a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting quality sleep and avoiding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to cope with stress
- practising relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to give your body a chance to settle and readjust to a calm state.

Tips for talking with children about the coronavirus

Children will inevitably pick up on the concerns and anxiety of others, whether this be through listening and observing what is happening at home or at school. It is important that they can speak to you about their own concerns.

Answer their questions

Do not be afraid to talk about the coronavirus with children. Given the extensive media coverage and the increasing number of people wearing face masks in public, it is not surprising that some children are already aware of the virus.

Providing opportunities to answer their questions in an honest and age-appropriate way can help reduce any anxiety they may be experiencing. You can do this by:

- speaking to them about coronavirus in a calm manner
- asking them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings they may have
- letting them know that it is normal to experience some anxiety when new and stressful situations arise
- giving them a sense of control by explaining what they can do to stay safe (e.g., wash their hands regularly, stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing)
- not overwhelming them with unnecessary information (e.g., death rates) as this can increase their anxiety
- reassure them that coronavirus is less common and severe in children compared to adults
- allowing regular contact (e.g., by phone) with people they may worry about, such as grandparents, to reassure them that they are okay.

Talk about how they are feeling

Explain to your child that it is normal to feel worried about getting sick. Listen to your child's concerns and reassure them that you are there to help them with whatever may arise in the future.

It is important to model calmness when discussing the coronavirus with children and not alarm them with any concerns you may have about it. Children will look to you for cues on how to manage their own worries so it is important to stay calm and manage your own anxieties before bringing up the subject with them and answering their questions.

Limit media exposure

It is important to monitor children's exposure to media reports about the coronavirus as frequent exposure can increase their level of fear and anxiety. Try to be with your child when they are watching, listening or reading the news so you are able to address any questions or concerns they may have.

Seek additional support when needed

If you feel that the stress or anxiety you or your child experience as a result of the coronavirus is impacting on everyday life, a psychologist may be able to help.

Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals, skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.

If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details.

There are number of ways to access a psychologist. You can:

- use the Australia-wide Find a Psychologist™ service. Go to findapsychologist.com.au or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

More information

Australian Government Department of Health

The Department of Health has developed a collection of resources for the general public, health professionals and industry about coronavirus (COVID-19), including translated resources.

<https://bit.ly/38OwHe>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides reliable information about the coronavirus such as its symptoms, steps you can take to protect yourself, and what to do if you are affected.

<https://bit.ly/39MEml8>

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization provides information and guidance regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease.

<https://bit.ly/3cQUwCw>

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