

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Managing the Stress and Anxiety

As the situation with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) unfolds, it is acknowledged that individuals may be experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety. These are normal and understandable reactions in situations of uncertainty and change. From a wellbeing perspective, it's important that individuals are aware of the signs of stress that they may experience and know effective ways to manage their mental health in such times.

Recognising Signs of Stress

The following list is not comprehensive, however it can provide you with an idea of what stress might look like for you. Always seek medical advice if you are in doubt.

Physical signs

- Constant fatigue
- Backache
- Persistently raised pulse or blood pressure
- Flushing or sweating
- Headaches, including migraine
- Sleep problems
- Sexual problems
- Muscle tension, aches or stiffness (especially neck and shoulders)
- Skin problems (hives, eczema, psoriasis, itching)
- Constant colds, minor ailments or infections
- Dizziness, disturbed vision
- Heart palpitations
- Chest pains
- Asthma or shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Numbness in hands or feet
- Digestive problems (upset or acid stomach, abdominal cramps, heartburn, wind, irritable bowel syndrome)
- Nausea
- Constipation, diarrhea
- Trembling
- Excessive sweating, cold/sweaty hands or feet
- Hair loss
- Dry mouth
- Jaw pain
- Grinding teeth at night

Psychological signs

- Increased anxiety
- Irritability
- Anger
- Suspicious or defensive, sensitive to criticism
- Mood swings
- Tearful, over-emotional
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mind racing or going blank

Feeling out of control and dealing with the “panic” and “fear”

Along with feeling some of the usual stress symptoms, you may at times experience moments of panic and/or fear. Our fear and panic becomes amplified in situations where there are many unknowns and uncertainties. In addition, the less we feel in control, the more panicked we can become. When we are in a ‘heightened’ state of fear, we don’t always make the best decisions or behave in ways we normally would (think about the fighting over toilet paper for a moment!) The key is to remain as calm as possible (take a breath) and focus on the things you can control (i.e. seeking accurate information, staying home if you are unwell, hand washing and other hygiene practices). This, as well as prioritising your self-care at this time will ensure as an individual you are responding in a sensible and positive way.

Tips on Coping

Acknowledge and validate normal reactions

Ensure you allow yourself time to notice and express what you are feeling. Ignoring feelings can cause them to get bigger. Simply acknowledge and name your feelings and look for ways to express your feelings, whether it be through talking about it, writing about it or practicing meditation.

Try to maintain your usual routine where possible

Having a routine can have a positive impact on your thoughts and feelings and can help with managing feelings of uncertainty. A healthy routine can include eating a healthy diet, partaking in physical activity, doing enjoyable activities, and ensuring you get adequate sleep. Whilst there may be cancellations or quarantine periods that impact on regular routines, try to look for ways to adapt. (for e.g. if your usual gym class is not operating, think about how you can still do your gym workout at home).

Stay connected with support networks

Receiving and giving support in times of stress is crucial. Spending time with supportive family and friends can bring a sense of comfort and stability. If there are challenges with face to face connect with others, think about other ways you can stay connected, via phone, video chat or messaging services.

Seek out accurate information

Seeking information helps us to understand and feel more in control of what’s happening. It is important though that you seek information through appropriate and reputable sources such as government health and world health organisation websites.

Manage your exposure to social media and the news

Whilst it’s normal to want to seek out information in relation via social media and the news, overexposure can unnecessarily heighten feelings of anxiety. You may find it useful to limit your exposure during these times.

Maintain times of relaxation/rest

Slow, deep and controlled breathing helps to reduce our stress response. Ensure you continue to take time out when you need to ‘recharge your batteries’.

How can you assist others?

- Provide basic facts, don't over analyse or get stuck in the 'rumour' mill.
- If you are uncertain yourself about what the facts are, be honest.
- Use a calm tone of voice when communicating with others.
- Be honest about your own feelings about the situation.
- If you are concerned about someone, sit with them and acknowledge their feelings. It may be suitable to recommend they reach out to the EAP, suggest this gently.
- Ask the person what they think would help them in those moments of distress.
- Reassure them that "we are all in this together" and you are here to support them at this time.

Support from your Employee Assistance Program

Support will continue to be available to you as part of your Employee Assistance Program.

A telephone or video counselling session may be offered in lieu of face to face appointments if there are specific risk factors identified for both the client and clinician.

Phone: 1800 056 076

Website: www.gryphonpsych.com.au

App: Download the Gryphon App – "Gryphon EAP"