

Coronavirus Stress: Managing Stress and Concerns

As coronavirus (COVID-19) news spreads, it has created stress for many of us. For others, it has added to existing anxieties. Sensationalized stories add to our angst and panic. The stock market has responded with a downturn, and many are unsure whether to travel or attend social gatherings. Our current experience may be similar to our response to other stressful world events: HIV, H1N1, SARS, mass shootings and 9/11.

It is healthy to have a respect for the COVID-19, the Flu and other communicable diseases, but we need not panic. Accurate information, preparation and evidence-based practice are powerful tools. Here are some ways to cope:

Reduce anxiety by reducing your risk: Arm yourself with the facts and review protocols which are in place that apply to infectious diseases. Knowing you are doing what you can to avoid contracting COVID-19 and unintentionally spreading it can give you a sense of control and help keep you calm. See our [fact sheet](#) on practical ways to avoid getting and spreading COVID-19.

Limit media exposure. Being informed can be helpful but overloading yourself with constant updates can perpetuate unnecessary anxiety. Set a limit for how often you will check media. And stick with reliable sources you can trust, such as the CDC, NIH and World Health Organization. Learning what is known about this virus is helpful in combating anxiety, speculation and the media frenzy. See our [online resource list](#) for these and many more reliable sources.

Get the facts. Avoid rumors. If you are not sure what is real, get clarification from a trusted person or source. For instance, if rumors are running rampant at work, ask your supervisor what is really happening.

Watch for and address distressing thoughts. Practice techniques such as cognitive reframing and mindful meditation. These can help prevent distorted thought habits such as catastrophizing, shaming, and others from taking over. For more information about these techniques go [here](#) and [here](#).

Keep as much normalcy in your routine as possible. Even if asked to work from home, self-quarantine or limit activities, strive to keep as much of your normal routine as you can.

Maintain social support. Get creative and find ways to connect: For instance, if you normally meet a colleague for lunch and are forced to work at home, make an appointment to talk via skype while you both eat lunch at the same time. Find people you connect with and can talk to about your worries or concerns.

Don't stop living - do things that are fun. Seek enjoyment. Stop and appreciate the things that are important to you, such as family, nature and music. Enjoy life's small moments: a smile, the smell of a flower, a cup of coffee, reading a good book, petting your dog, a movie, time with friends and family; etc. Find activities that can keep your mind from dwelling on your worries. Hobbies, books, crafts, exercise are just a few examples.

Practice good self-care: Get enough sleep, eat well and stay physically active. Maintain a healthy balance between work and home life. All these will help you build resilience to cope with difficult situations.

Continue your treatment. If you have an existing mental health condition, monitor for new or increased symptoms and let your health provider know.

The coronavirus is a reality. It is in the news and on our minds. We do not have control over it, but we do have control over how we respond, emotionally. If you are struggling with feeling stressed about this, psychological support is available.

Emotional Support Contacts

- As an employee, retiree or their household member, if you need someone to talk with about your individual concerns, call Faculty/Staff Assistance Services (FSAS) for a confidential appointment (217) 244-5312.
- If you are experiencing a crisis and need immediate emotional assistance, call the FSAS crisis line at (217) 244-7739 or 911.