

Coping with fear and anxiety associated with COVID-19

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It is normal during this time of uncertainty and the recently declared COVID-19 pandemic to speculate on the potential spread of the virus and to experience feelings of worry or anxiety. Health care workers may be particularly vulnerable to such reactions.

While we all react somewhat differently, when we are uncertain about our own and our family's health and safety, we may experience physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions. You may experience a range of reactions varying in intensity as you continue to hear about the health, social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. You may find yourself preoccupied with news events which may trigger worrying thoughts.

Are these reactions “typical”?

Absolutely. These are normal reactions that human beings experience when they are in abnormally distressing situations. Research has shown that when you acknowledge anxiety and you take care of it, anxiety will usually diminish.

What can you do to manage fear and anxiety?

- Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions than to the event itself.
- Be kind to yourself. Don't judge, blame, or criticize yourself for having these reactions. Be patient. Think about how you would support a friend in this situation and then treat yourself the same way.
- Try to reduce other sources of stress in your life for the time being.
- Take the time to talk about your physical and emotional reactions with someone close to you like a friend, partner or loved one. You can also turn to coworkers.
- Let your family, colleagues and friends know how they could best support you during your period of stress. If they are doing something unhelpful, give yourself permission to let them know.
- Find something that helps distract you. Some people find it helpful to keep busy through leisure activities, hobbies, routine chores, warm baths or [physical activity](#).
- Take time to rest and maintain good [sleep habits](#).
- Try to avoid saturation from exposure to the constant media coverage of this news.

- If you find you are experiencing distressing thoughts and feeling anxious, remind yourself that most of us are safe and not affected by this disease.

It's best to not keep the worrying thoughts and anxieties all to yourself. If you are experiencing a high state of stress for prolonged periods, contact PHSA's [Employee & Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) to speak with a counsellor.

- **Homewood Health: 1-800-663-1142** or www.homeweb.ca
Homewood Health offers free and confidential coaching and counselling services for staff in quarantine through video counselling, phone, private online chat, or private messaging.
- Homewood Health's [Health & Wellness Library](#)
This library is a collection of resources written by qualified experts.
- [Anxiety Canada' free online resources](#)
For those experiencing persistent stress or heightened anxiety, Anxiety Canada has many free downloadable resources.

PHSA's Psychological Health and Safety team supports the mental health of all employees in any PHSA program, service, or division. To learn more about the programs and services available to staff, [visit us on POD](#) or at PHSA.ca. Questions? Email healthpromotion@phsa.ca.