

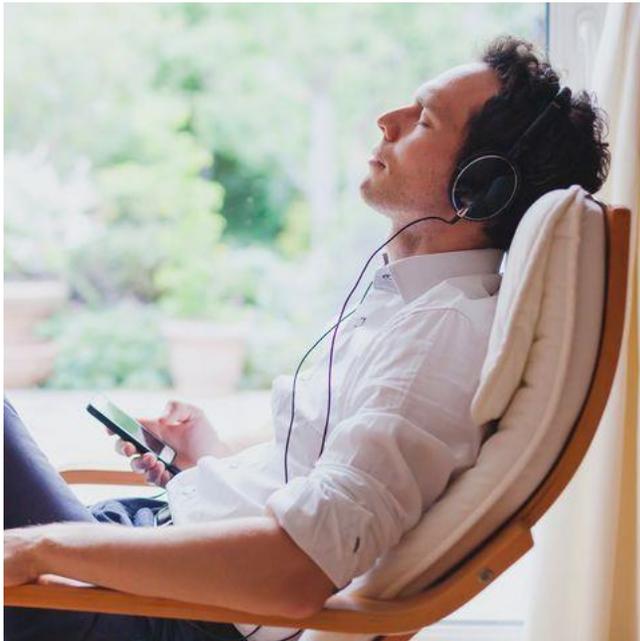
8 Ways to Relieve Coronavirus-Induced Anxiety, According to Psychologists

Feeling overwhelmed? These psychologist-approved tips will help you feel better.

By Jake Smith

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https://www.prevention.com/health/mental-health/a31469215/coronavirus-anxiety-tips/?fbclid=IwAR3AyAZ0_q2hTWRGFLWE2FDET46NfizCZlwHuz-KfMucq8Okie1dmOUUpEoA



ANYABERKUTGETTY IMAGES

Earlier this week, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. All of Italy has gone into lockdown to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. Universities, theaters, and events around the world have shuttered. Grocery stores are lined with empty shelves. Confirmed cases continue to rise across the United States. In short: You're probably feeling overwhelmed right now.

"There's no question that people are on edge," says board-certified psychologist David H. Rosmarin, Ph.D., assistant professor in

psychology at Harvard Medical School and founder of the Center for Anxiety. "People who have preexisting anxiety disorders—and there are a lot of them—seem to be seeing increasing severity of anxiety, and people who don't have a disorder seem to be suffering from those crippling symptoms, too."

It's completely normal to feel more anxious than ever in the middle of a COVID-19 outbreak—but understanding that fact might not make coping any easier. However, experts say there are plenty of strategies that can at least reduce your fears. Here's what psychologists and psychiatrists from around the country recommend for alleviating coronavirus-induced anxiety.

1. Practice good self-care.

During a crisis, you can easily forget to take care of yourself while only focusing on negative thoughts. Your first priority, however, should be making sure you're taking self-care seriously. "Get enough sleep, exercise, eat well," says psychiatrist Beth Salcedo, M.D., medical director of the Ross Center and immediate past president of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. "Do everything you can to take care of your physical health, which is helpful for your mental health." Self-care is deeply personal and takes many forms, but staying active, doing hobbies you enjoy, listening to music, and calling loved ones all help.

2. Go for a walk.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently recommends keeping a distance of about six feet from others when possible. But even with social distancing and self-quarantines in effect, you still have access to the outdoors, which can do wonders for your mental and physical health, says clinical psychologist Jonathan Horowitz, Ph.D., certified cognitive therapist and director of the San Francisco Stress and Anxiety Center.

“Getting outside right now is so, so important,” he says. “As long as you avoid big groups, there’s nothing harmful indicated about going for a walk outside. We still have that.” Bonus points if you can find some greenery: One 2015 study found that people who went for a 50-minute walk in a natural environment more effectively decreased their anxiety and overwhelming thoughts compared to those who went for a similar walk in an urban area.

3. Limit your screen time.

“People need to be really careful about how much news they’re watching, how much time they spend on this issue, and where they’re getting their information,” Dr. Salcedo warns, noting that too much information can be just as harmful as too little.

One boundary to set in place: “I don’t think people should be checking any electronic devices an hour before bedtime,” Rosmarin says. “Nothing’s going to change that you need to know about between 10 p.m. and whenever you wake up in the morning.” This will not only keep your mental health in a good place, but you’ll sleep more soundly, too.

4. Plan, don’t panic.

As human beings, we have a tendency to “catastrophize,” or to receive bad news and concoct worst-case scenarios in our heads. “You hear about coronavirus and you start to think, ‘Oh, what if I end up in the hospital, what if I lose my job, what if my business closes,’” Horowitz says. “Our minds are like threat detection systems, but it’s really important to be able to use that power in a constructive way.”

He suggests jotting down your worst fears about the future and addressing them one-by-one, possibly even discussing them with someone you trust who is calm. This can help you form strategies for how to deal with each one realistically. “What you don’t want to do is get stuck in that mode where you’re just thinking and thinking about the worst possible outcome,” Horowitz says. “We can work ourselves up to where it’s almost like that actually happens.” Planning for the future is great—it’s panicking that will hurt your mental health.

6. Try meditation.

The Easiest Way to Practice Meditation



EMILY SCHIFF-SLATER

“I’m a big believer in [meditation](#),” Dr. Salcedo says. And studies support its stress-busting benefits: After Johns Hopkins University researchers looked at 47 trials (which included more than 3,500 people), they found that mindfulness meditation programs could help improve anxiety, according to a [meta-analysis](#) published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

Here’s how to start:

1. Get yourself to a comfortable area without distractions. You can meditate in a chair, on the floor, lying down, or even standing up or walking.
2. Once you’ve found your spot, start by centering yourself with a few deep breaths. “As you inhale and exhale deeply, silently say ‘in’ and ‘out’ with each breath,” Nina Smiley, Ph.D., director of mindfulness programming at [Mohonk Mountain House](#) in New York recently told [Prevention.com](#).
3. “During this cycle, if a thought comes into the mind, gently and non-judgmentally acknowledge it, let it go, and return to the breath,” Smiley says.
4. Aim for at least 10 minutes, if you can.

[Meditation apps](#) and YouTube can be great resources for beginners. “Practice it every day, twice a day, if you can,” Dr. Salcedo says. “That’s a great way to reset a very anxious body and mind.”

7. Stay social.

“Even with a lot of people in isolation, it doesn’t mean we have to *live* in isolation,” Rosmarin says. “I think people should still be getting together, so to speak, as much they can, whether it’s just one-on-one, having people come over, or using electronic means to stay interpersonally connected.” There are plenty of ways to stay in contact, even while under quarantine, whether it’s a funny Slack conversation with your coworkers, a phone call with your parents, or a video chat with your best friend.

8. Focus on what you can control.

There’s no easy way to accept a lack of control—but it’s a good idea to start trying. “What really has to happen here is an acceptance and understanding that we’re not in control; that’s the reality,” Rosmarin says. “We can do certain things to prevent the disease from spreading, but we can’t guarantee it.”

The best thing to do, in this case, is to understand that uncertainty over COVID-19 doesn’t mean a lack of options. “This is a time of uncertainty and people feeling like nothing’s in their control, so they should focus on what is in their control,” Dr. Salcedo says, “like whether they spend time with friends or not, whether they get their exercise for the day or not, and trying to engage in things that will keep them from thinking about the issues that make them anxious.”

All things in your control? These prevention strategies from the CDC:

- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who appears to be sick.
- Wash your hands well and frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water isn’t readily available.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Stay home if you develop cold or flu-like symptoms.
- Avoid nonessential travel to areas with active COVID-19 outbreaks.
- Visit the website for your local health department to make sure you are getting accurate updates.