



Anxiety in a Time of Coronavirus; Help, I was Anxious Before COVID-19

For many of us anxiety is a way of life; a constant that we manage and battle. Anxiety is the most common mental illness in Canada, with 12% of the population being regularly impacted by mild to severe anxiety¹. Many of us seek treatment for anxiety on a regular basis. During times of increased community stress, our anxiety can become highly exacerbated. For Canadians that struggle regularly with anxiety's debilitating effects, functioning during this unprecedented pandemic may be very difficult.

COVID-19 has suddenly changed how we live. Additional precautions have been put in place that mean many of us are working from home, avoiding entertainment, sports events, or any large gatherings of people. School closures and widespread social disruption can leave everyone confused about what to do next. With our children at home and our seniors needing protection from exposure, it is a time when we may be most stressed. How do we cope with isolation and uncertainty without panicking or becoming immobilized? When we are already an anxious person, how do we do to manage during this intense time?

Anxiety and Acceptance

With anxiety symptoms, the first thing to do is to recognize them for what they are. Anxiety is always worse when we try to repress it and deny it. Accept and understand that as an anxious person, this is going to be a hard time for you. Identify your anxiety symptoms and be ready for them. Ignoring growing feelings of stress or panic is the way to increase them. Rely on tried and true deep breathing techniques and remind yourself this will pass. There are a few things you can do to prepare during this time. First, it may help to make a plan that can keep you steady; second, keeping to your daily routines as much as possible will help you avoid panicking.

Make a Plan

It is advisable to have a plan in place should you need help. This can reduce the real anxiety you feel about what can happen. You and your family and friends can create a group to help each other with supplies like groceries or caring for pets. It may be wise to start a group text with your neighbours to keep up on one another's health and provide assistance with supplies if you or they cannot go out. Set up times to video chat with elderly friends and family so you can feel better about their health and safety. This can also help with feelings of isolation. Identify a few key people outside your immediate family that can be your back up and make sure contact numbers are exchanged.

Self Care Routines

It is very important that you take care of yourself and try to maintain some of your regular activities. If you are experiencing work from home or reduced work hours, try to keep as much to routine as possible, such as waking up as usual and following your normal shower and coffee schedules. Your routine may no longer include the gym but you can include walks and exercise at home. Replace your evening yoga class with an online class that you can follow virtually. The more you can keep routines going, the better for your anxiety. It is fine to get out of the house as long as you are not ill and you maintain social distance. Refill your medication so you are not anxious about running out. Your therapist may be able to continue appointments virtually or by phone as well. You can take a run outside or walk the dog. You can stay connected to work mates through phone, video or social media. Be sure to take breaks from social media and the news so that you stay informed but not over stimulated.

Here are some resources to consider:

Call your EAP; they are not just in person counselling, they have telephone and virtual options.

You can do a self assessment online; here is the Ontario Government assessment

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-self-assessment>

Here is an article on mindfulness

<https://cmha.ca/documents/mindfulness>

Toll free mental health crisis response. Please call 1-833-456-4566 toll free (In QC: 1-866-277-3553), 24/7 or visit www.crisisservicescanada.ca

This is a very difficult time for everyone. It is important if you suffer from anxiety or are prone to being anxious for you to take extra time to care for yourself and put plans in place to mitigate your anxiety.