

## Looking after your health and wellbeing

The recent outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a significant impact on people worldwide, and has implications here in New Zealand. Given the extensive media coverage of COVID-19, many New Zealanders are feeling stressed about the situation. Some anxiety is normal and can help us prepare and reduce our risk. Remember to wash your hands, stay home if you're sick, self-isolate as necessary, and don't spread panic. Make a wellbeing plan with exercise, good sleep and a healthy diet.

Too much anxiety can create and spread panic. With uncertain threats like this one, our anxious minds can overestimate the danger posed to us, and underestimate our ability to cope. If you find yourself thinking a lot about the impact of the virus, ask yourself "Am I Worrying or Planning?" WORRYING involves rumination about things beyond our control and worst-case scenarios, whereas PLANNING involves goal-focused problem-solving.

Are you finding it difficult to control worries about the virus? Is it impacting your ability to sleep, work, or enjoy life? When we are frequently exposed to negative news, we can become worried and fearful. Checking for updates too often can escalate anxiety and increase exposure to sensationalism and misinformation. Limiting exposure to news, sticking to reliable sources of information, and ensuring that you connect with people about things other than just this issue can help alleviate anxiety. When we receive and provide support we build our resilience and form stronger families and communities. Reach out to family, friends, and others you trust. Anxious thoughts, feelings, or behaviours are our body's reminder that we may need to take a break from exposure and engage in a positive activity instead. What do you enjoy doing? What helps you feel calm? (modified)

Below is a guide (**adapted from NZ Institute of wellbeing**) to coping in the days ahead. These are some of the practical strategies that will help.

1. **Choose where you focus your attention.** Even at the best of times, humans are hard-wired to notice threats and weakness. During the worst of times it is more important than ever for our psychological health to tune into what's still good in your world. Psychologists call this 'benefit finding' and it is a key resilience skill. For example start your day with thinking about some good stuff.
2. **Deliberately seek out the people (and do the stuff) that make you happy.** Research shows how vital experiencing positive emotions is for our resilience. Negative emotions are contagious, and prolonged feelings of helplessness are strongly associated with depression. Given negative emotions and experiences stick to us like Velcro while positive emotions and experiences bounce off like Teflon, aim to punctuate your days, evenings, weeks and weekends with as many positive emotion experiences as possible. This means connecting with people or things that provide you with a positive experiences.
3. **Strong and supportive relationships are the number one predictor of wellbeing, across the lifespan.** Maintaining those connections during times of crisis and challenge is more important than ever. Feeling isolated from others is strongly related to depression, anxiety and other forms of mental distress. **If you can't catch up with your key supportive people face to face right now, find other ways of doing so.** And if you're not used to using other options such as skype, zoom, or social media apps to call, find someone who can teach about this or call them.

4. **Keep supportive daily routines or create new ones if you're now holed up at home. "As Normal as Possible, as Flexible as Necessary"**. Maintaining regular routines (meal times, bedtimes, exercise, work etc.) tells our brains it's safe to dial that stress response back down and prevents us from feeling more anxious. But, unprecedented times call for unprecedented responses: be prepared to have your best plans change, and open-minded enough to conjure up or accept new and different ways of doing things.
5. **Focus on what matters, and what you can control**. Concentrate all your attention and resources (psychological, social, physical, emotional, knowledge) on the things that matter and **that you can actually influence**. Easy to write, hard to do, but worrying about things you cannot change will only upset you and frustrate you further.
6. **Watch your media diet – keep using the "helping or harming" test**. Take a good look at your media intake over a 24 period and ask yourself, "is reading these articles, watching these videos, or reviewing these headlines, helping or harming the way I'm feeling and functioning?" Don't let those images, videos and notifications invade your day, your head, or your world. If the global news is making you feel overwhelmed, turn it off. Claim back some control by switching them off. Choose where you get your news updates from very carefully making sure these are reliable sources.
7. **Find the right people to talk to**. (Yes, the 'helping or harming' test applies to the people in your life too). Share your thoughts and feelings, but don't get swept up in pointless speculation. Stick to the facts and avoid the drama queens. Keep asking yourself, 'Is this conversation helping or harming me in my quest to feel good and function as best I can right now?'
8. **Help yourself by helping others**. This takes the attention off ourselves and we all need to feel useful and needed right now. The research is unequivocal: being able to give as well as receive is hugely important for our life satisfaction. How can you help vulnerable neighbours, colleagues, friends or strangers – emotionally, physically, practically?
9. **Give your brain a holiday from Coronavirus**. Avoid 'rumination' by giving your poor overly-busy wandering mind a rest by deliberately participating in seriously engaging activities. Be that the crossword, Netflix, following a new recipe, dancing, listening to music or a Podcast, reading, chatting on the phone, playing dress ups with the kids, drawing, or meditating, you'll know your thing. This is the best way to turn off our running ruminating minds which otherwise can chew over worries, making us feel worse.
10. **Have a 'timed wallow'**. No good ever comes from ruminating or wallowing in misery and self-pity for over a minute – put a timer on, and then phone a friend or find something really distracting to do (see #10 above).
11. **Be kind to yourself and others**. Remember everyone is doing their best to navigate these exceptional times. A little kindness will go a long way. A lot of kindness is even better (even to the drama queens).

The following are some more detailed coping strategies that you can utilise.

### **Slow Breathing Technique**

This technique can be used as the basis for managing your anxiety.

This technique is to be used at the first signs of anxiety or panic. Do this before tackling a difficult situation or any time when you feel tense or anxious.

1. **Focus** on your breath.
2. **Breathe through your nose** if you are able.
3. **Work on slowing each breath**, so that you breathe in for 3 seconds, and breathe out for 3 seconds. (This will give you a breathing rate of 10 breaths per minute.)
4. It may be difficult to slow your breathing this much at first, or you may find that it takes longer to breathe out than to breathe in. Do what feels comfortable. **The key is to work on *slowing* your breathing.**
5. Concentrate on **making your breaths smooth and light**. Relax your stomach muscles.

Continue breathing in this way until you are feeling calmer.

Sometimes you will notice that the symptoms of anxiety return after a short while. That's okay – just do your controlled breathing again for as long as it takes to settle.

If you do these things as soon as you notice the first signs of over breathing, anxiety, or panic, the symptoms should subside in a few minutes.



## 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

### **HOW TO DO IT:**

This technique will take you through your five senses to help remind you of the present. This is a calming technique that can help you get through tough or stressful situations.

Take a deep belly breath to begin.

**5 - LOOK:** Look around for 5 things that you can see, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I see the computer, I see the cup, I see the picture frame.

**4 - FEEL:** Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel the hair on the back of my neck, or I feel the pillow I am sitting on.

**3 - LISTEN:** Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of traffic outside, the sound of typing or the sound of your tummy rumbling. Say the three things out loud.

**2 - SMELL:** Say two things you can smell. If you're allowed to, it's okay to move to another spot and sniff something. If you can't smell anything at the moment or you can't move, then name your 2 favorite smells.

**1 - TASTE:** Say one thing you can taste. It may be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth, or a mint from after lunch. If you can't taste anything, then say your favorite thing to taste.

Take another deep belly breath to end.

### Anxiety Grounding Techniques

- Breathe slowly and steadily from your core.
- Call a friend and have a chat.
- Wiggle your fingers, tap your feet. Pay attention to the movement.
- Eat or drink something. Is it hot, or cold? Sweet, or sour?
- Meditate or use distractions like television or music to help settle down.
- Say your name or pick up a book and read the first paragraph you find out loud.
- Write out what's going on.
- Take a shower/bath. Notice the sensations.
- Imagine yourself in a familiar, comfortable place.
- Take a look outside. Count the number of trees and street signs.
- Exercise
- Hold onto something comforting. Maybe a blanket or an old stuffed toy.

### Quick muscle relaxation exercises

- **Arms & Hands:** Clench your fists and your arms out in front of you hold for a count of 10 ....then relax
- **Legs & feet:** push your toes downwards & raise your legs & stretch out in front of you hold for a count of 10 ... then relax
- **Stomach:** push out your stomach muscles take a deep breath & hold it for a count of 5....& relax

## **Self Soothe Techniques**

Some of us may recognize these techniques as things that we already use. But many of us have never learned how to self-soothe, how to do those often simple things that makes us feel better.

These are mostly very physical techniques that use different body senses. Some of us have never had the feeling that we could do things to make ourselves feel better, calmer, feel relaxation or pleasure. I urge you to experiment with these techniques until you find some that are comfortable and helpful for you. And when you find these, practice them. Use them when you are feeling distressed, when emotions feel overwhelming, when situations feel like you can't stand them anymore. Try something that gives you pleasure and comfort.

**SELF-SOOTHING** has to do with comforting, nurturing and being kind to yourself.

### **VISION:**

Walk in a pretty part of town or park remember to either do this alone or with someone who you are self-isolated this . Look at the nature around you. Sit in you garden. Light a candle and watch the flame. Look at a book with beautiful scenery or beautiful art. Watch a travel movie or video.

### **HEARING:**

Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to tapes of the ocean or other sounds of nature. Sit by a river or ocean. Listen to someone chopping wood. When you are listening, be mindful, letting the sounds come and go.

### **SMELL:**

Smell breakfast being cooked at home. Notice all the different smells around you. Walk in a garden or in the woods, maybe just after a rain, and breathe in the smells of nature. Light a scented candle or incense. Bake some bread or a cake, and take in all the smells.

### **TASTE:**

Have a special treat, and eat it slowly, savouring each bite. Cook a favourite meal. Drink a soothing drink like herbal tea or hot chocolate. Let the taste run over your tongue and slowly down your throat. Go to a potluck, and eat a little bit of each dish, mindfully tasting each new thing.

### **TOUCH:**

Take a bubble bath. Pet your dog or cat or cuddle a baby. Put on a silk shirt or blouse, and feel its softness and smoothness. Sink into a really comfortable bed. Float or swim in a pool, and feel the water caress your body.

## Resources & support services (both local & national)

<u>Support services</u>	<u>Phone number</u>	<u>Website</u>
<b><u>Ministry of Health website-</u></b> provides accurate up to date information on Covid-19		<a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/">https://www.health.govt.nz/</a>
<b><u>Health Line-</u></b> Dedicated Health line 0800 number for COVID-19 health advice and information which is operating 24 hours a day 7 days per week.	0800 358 5453	
<b><u>Trained counsellor-</u></b> You can free call or text at any time to speak with a trained counsellor – it's free and confidential	1737	
<b><u>Emergency Psychiatric services (EPS)- Dunedin</u></b>  Emergencies  General mental Health enquiries	0800467846  0800443366	
<b><u>Dominoes</u></b> For people over 70 dominoes will provide free pizza (if you live in the delivery area). Phone the 0800 number leave name and phone number	0800292000 (24 hour notice needed)	
<b><u>Mental health foundation-</u></b> they have lots of advice & tips as to what you can do to look after yourself		<a href="https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/">https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/</a>
<b><u>National ANXIETY HELPLINE</u></b>	0800 ANXIETY or 0800 269 4389.	
<b><u>Lifeline</u></b>	0800 543 354 or free text 4357 (HELP)	
<b><u>Youth line</u></b>	0800 376 633 or free text 234	
<b><u>Samaritans</u></b>	0800 726 666	
<b><u>Queer support OUSA</u></b> (Facebook messenger or email for support)		<a href="https://www.ousa.org.nz/support/queer-support">https://www.ousa.org.nz/support/queer-support</a>