

Mental Health for All

Frequently Asked Questions on Coronavirus (COVID-19)



We are experiencing an entirely new environment when the nation is facing its first ever lockdown that too due to the global pandemic. It is a common fact that large majority of the people today would experience some degree of negative impact on their wellbeing because of self-isolation and social distancing. The current situation is increasing anxiety levels and reinforcing negative thoughts amongst people in varied circumstances. If you are facing any mental health issues – or concerns, don't worry, there are a ways in which you help yourself and your near and dear ones.

Following are some common concerns which you may be facing, you can read ahead to find some plausible solutions.

- **How social media is shaping our fears and response to the coronavirus?**

While some are concerned about the infection spreading, some are constantly tuned in to media reports about the virus and worrying about the future. So, we may develop anxieties and fears but if we adequately manage our emotions we will be able to deal with situations more effectively. While it is important to be aware of what is happening around us, over-hearing and over exposure to such news pieces could cause unnecessary distress.

So here is what you can do:

- Limit your time watching the news.
- Rely on trustworthy news sources.
- Switch channel or switch off if anything is distressing you.
- Don't share/forward misinformation, fake news to families and friends.

- **How to stay healthy and mentally fit?**

As per your judgement and suitability engage in prayer, meditation, breathing exercises and hearing inspirational discourses. Take care of your physical health as well with following an exercise regime at home, have proper meals, follow a sleep schedule etc. Some other strategies could be:

Maintain a positive outlook: remember it is a phase and it will pass.
Avoid overthinking.

- **Maintain a routine:** Even if you're held up at home, try to stick to your regular sleep, school/college, meal, or work schedule. This can help you maintain a sense of normalcy.
- **Get involved pleasurable activities:** Read good books, watch light entertainment programmes, play indoor or video game, make something e.g. a new recipe, a craft, or a piece of art etc. that takes you out of your worries.
- **Get close to nature, if possible:** Sunshine and fresh air will do you good. Even a walk around your terrace or balcony can make you feel better. Just be sure to avoid crowds, keep your distance from people you encounter, and obey restrictions in your area.
- **Find ways to exercise:** Staying active releases anxiety, relieves stress, and elevates mood. You can look online for exercise videos which you like and can follow. There are many things you can do such as yoga and exercises.
- **Avoid intoxicants:** Be careful that you are not using alcohol or other substances to deal with anxiety or depression.
- **Take up a relaxation practice:** When stressors throw your nervous system out of balance, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can bring you back into a state of equilibrium. Regular practice would give you greatest benefits, so see if you can set aside even a little time every day.

- **How to remain physically distant at the same time socially connected?**

Make it a priority to stay in touch with your friends and family. If you tend to withdraw when depressed or anxious, think about scheduling regular phone, chat, or Skype meetings to connect with others and to counteract that tendency.

In this time of social distancing and lockdown, substitute could be

video chatting if you're able to. Face-to-face contact is "therapeutic" for your mental health that may reduce your risk of depression and helping ease stress and anxiety.

Social media can be a powerful tool now for connecting with friends, family, and acquaintances, it could help in feeling connected to our communities, country, and the world.

Be aware and don't let coronavirus dominate every conversation. It's important to take breaks from stressful thoughts about the pandemic to simply enjoy - to laugh, share stories, and focus on other things going on in our lives.

- **How to practice the acts of kindness and helping others to uplifting our lives?**

Reach out to others in need. If you know people in your community who are isolated - particularly the elderly or disabled- you can still offer support. Perhaps older neighbours need help with groceries, medicines etc. You can always leave packages at their doorstep to avoid direct contact. Or maybe they just need to hear a friendly, reassuring voice over the phone. Many local social media groups can help put you in touch with vulnerable people in your area.

Donate to foods banks. Panic-buying and hoarding have left grocery store empty but have also drastically reduced supplies. You can help older adults, low-income families, and others in need by donating food or cash.

Be a calming influence. If friends or loved ones are panicking, try to help them gain some perspective on the situation. Instead of scaring or giving credibility to false rumours, refer them to reputable news sources. Being a positive, uplifting influence in these anxious times can help you feel better about your own situation too.

Be kind to others. An infectious disease is not connected to any racial or ethnic group, so speak up if you hear negative stereotypes that only promote prejudice. With the right outlook and intentions, we can all ensure that kindness and charity spread throughout our communities even faster than this virus.

- **I feel anxious and fearful due to COVID-19 situation. Is there a way to**

control my anxieties?

It is important to pay attention to your feelings. Try to divert your mind in healthy activities that you find relaxing. Exercising regularly, sleeping well and eating well and keeping things in correct perspective often help. The Government of India has taken up the challenge to curb the spread and they are doing their best. Follow preventive strategies and follow instructions given in reliable platforms. Do not watch or see news for long hours or browse through WhatsApp messages as it will heighten your anxieties, instead watch some entertaining shows to divert the mind as discussed in point 1.

- **I am quarantined in state facility/home as I came in contact with an infected person. I am feeling extremely fearful. What can I do?**

Only best option is to stay calm in this period that may help you in faster recovery process. Remember the inherent nature of life is constant change and wait for better tomorrow. Now-a-days there are many ways to stay connected with your family and friends. Try to follow the daily routine and engage in reading/writing/painting. Even if you develop symptoms be assured that disease is treatable. Positive outlook boosts immunity and will-power.

- **I feel hopeless in the current situation. It seems never-ending and I don't see a future. Could you help?**

It is quite normal to have negative feelings like hopelessness and anxiety in situations like this when the future is uncertain. You may have worries about yourself, your near and dear ones either in India or abroad, you may have concerns about your professional future or finances. It may look like there is no end to this, but that is not true. Take action and take care of yourself. In case you cannot manage your feelings reach out for professional help.

- **We are restricted at home and children in the family has become very demanding. It is becoming extremely stressful for us to handle them.**

Please suggest what can be done?

It is common for children to become more demanding under such restrictive circumstances. Spend some quality time with them, talk to them on what the situation means, help them stay positive and hopeful about things getting better soon. Chalk out a daily timetable for them so that they know what they have to do at what time, then they are less likely to disturb you all the time. In addition to their academic assignments, you could involve them in all life skills required at home e.g. making bed, wiping, cleaning dishes, cleaning etc.

- **I already have a mental illness and this situation is making me feel worse. What shall I do?**

Please seek an appointment with your psychiatrist and share your concerns. Do not ignore your feelings and symptoms. You may reach him/her over the phone as well as emails. You could also speak to our counsellors given in the list.

- **I'm working from home now, but not able to concentrate and feel pressurised by the work that has been assigned to me. What can I do?**

You may take an objective view of your work; simplify the assignment into specific and simple tasks. Avoid sitting for long hours for the same work. Take adequate breaks and follow a healthy routine. Do not try to change work routine largely, stick to the working hours of your office so that you feel less burdened. In case there are over-expectations, share your concerns with your supervisor and try to work around your given situation at home.

- **I am a student and worried about future course of my studies and career. Please suggest what should I do?**

The situation is not under anyone's control. These are extraordinary circumstances that we are facing. Have faith in your institution and the Government, they are equally worried about the situation and are working out ways to minimise any resultant loss for students. Stay calm,

this phase will pass, keep your faith alive.

- **If I have a family crisis and I need to be with my family during this lockdown. The feeling that I cannot travel is making me extremely anxious. What could I do?**

It is understandable that you want to be with your family members. The situation demands you do not take any travelling and risk of your health. Only advisable solution at this moment could be remain in touch with your family members through video-calling and telephone till the situation improves.

- **What are the signs that make a case for referral to a qualified mental health professional?**

- Feeling low and hopelessness
- Becoming depressed
- Any unusable changes in behaviour and mood
- Major alteration in sleep and appetite
- Changes in behaviour e.g. neglecting personal hygiene and daily living activities
- Changes in communication and behaviour patterns

- **If someone suffers from a pre-existing neuro-psychiatric conditions, what are the specific suggestions should be followed?**

- Consult your Mental Health professional regularly
- Take medication as per the prescription and help people get their medication or access medical services, if they need
- Ask the person to make sure they have someone to help them if required. Also consider linking the person with a NGO or other relevant support, to help them in the longer term.
- Check on basic needs, such as being able to eat and drink properly

NOTE: For any Counselling help fill the Self-Assessment Instrument given on our website and follow the instructions to speak to our counsellors.

Responses and strategies are adapted from a) WHO (2020) Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19. B) WHO (2011) War Trauma Foundation and World Vision International, Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers. C) Worried about someone's mental health? At www.rethink.org. 2017)

