

Coronavirus (COVID-19): managing stress and anxiety

This tipsheet covers understanding common reactions in yourself and others during the COVID-19 pandemic, what you can do to look after yourself and manage feelings of stress, anxiety, or distress associated with COVID-19, and helpful resources and support.

COVID-19: common reactions

As the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching implications continue to unfold globally and in our community, it's normal for people to experience a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions including:

- Feeling stressed or overwhelmed
- Anxiety, worry, or fear
- Racing thoughts
- Sadness, tearfulness, loss of interest in usual enjoyable activities
- Physical symptoms, such as increased heart rate, stomach upset, fatigue, or other uncomfortable sensations
- Frustration, irritability, or anger
- Restlessness or agitation

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(<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-transmission-reduction-measures>) measures in our efforts to slow the spread of transmission. People are naturally concerned for their own and their loved ones' health and safety. There is still much uncertainty.

It's important to recognise the seriousness of the public health challenge facing our community, *and* be mindful that reacting from a place of panic and fear is usually unhelpful, especially in the long-term. Looking after our wellbeing in times like this can help to reduce stress, and is crucial in enabling us to still take calm and effective action in the midst of this global crisis.

Strategies to cope with stress, anxiety or distress

When many things feel uncertain or out of our control, one of the most effective ways we can manage stress and anxiety is to focus on the actions that are in our control. Here are some ways you can take intentional steps to look after your physical and emotional wellbeing during this challenging time:

Learn how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. The Australian Department of Health has recommended [important actions](#)

(<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert#how-to-protect-yourself-and-others>)

we can all take to protect against infection and prevent the virus from spreading including [practising good hygiene](#)

(<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#good-hygiene>)

, [self-isolation](#)

(<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#selfisolation-selfquarantine>)

, and [social \(physical\) distancing](#)

(<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#social-distancing>)

Acknowledge your feelings. Whatever you are feeling right now, know that it's okay to feel that way. Allow yourself time to notice and express what you're feeling. This could be through journalling, talking with others, or channelling your emotions into something creative (e.g., drawing, painting, poetry, music). [Mindfulness meditation exercises](#)

(<https://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel/resources/guided-exercises/mindfulness-and-meditation>) can help

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those that we may have more opportunity to do if we're at home more often. Some ideas could be to:

- Keep learning and maintaining your study
- Read a book
- Listen to a podcast
- Try out a new hobby or skill (e.g., cook a new recipe, play an instrument, learn a language, learn how to sew, gardening).

Stay connected. Receiving support and care from others has a powerful effect on helping us cope with challenges. Spending time with supportive family and friends can bring a sense of comfort and stability. Talking through our concerns, thoughts, and feelings with others can also help us find helpful ways of thinking about or dealing with a stressful situation.

Remember that physical distancing does not need to mean social disconnection. There are many ways we can use technology to [stay connected](http://theconversation.com/social-distancing-can-make-you-lonely-heres-how-to-stay-connected-when-youre-in-lockdown-133693)

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, and both give and receive support (remotely). You could:

- Call, text, or video-chat with friends and family
- Share quick and easy recipes
- Start a virtual book or movie club
- Schedule a workout together over video chat
- Join an online group or peer forum.

Contribute. Showing care towards friends, family, or vulnerable people in our community can be all the more important during times like this. It can foster a sense of hope, purpose, and meaning. Some ideas can be to:

- Send someone you care about a message of encouragement or affirmation
- Cook, pack and deliver a meal to someone in your neighbourhood
- Donate to a cause

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- *What is a small helpful or positive action that I can take now?*

Seek accurate information. Finding credible sources you can trust is important to avoid the fear and panic that can be caused by misinformation. Follow sources like the [Australian Department of Health](https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert) (<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>), or the Australian Department of Education, Skills, and Employment for up-to-date [fact sheets, including advice and support specifically for international students](https://www.dese.gov.au/news/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov). (<https://www.dese.gov.au/news/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>)

Set limits around news and social media. It's understandable to want to keep informed and prepared. At the same time, constantly reading, watching, or listening to upsetting media coverage can unnecessarily intensify worry and agitation. When you get the urge to check updates, see if you can pause, notice the urge, delay acting on the urge, and let it pass without judgement. Schedule a specific time to check in with the news instead. It's also okay to take breaks from conversations with others about COVID-19 and suggest talking about other topics.

Stay up to date with university advice and support. Check the [University's student support website](https://students.unimelb.edu.au/student-support/coronavirus) (<https://students.unimelb.edu.au/student-support/coronavirus>) for important information, including course-specific updates and other advice for affected students.

Helpful resources and support

Tipsheets and online resources

- Australian Psychological Society (APS): [Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety](https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/5fbb4efe-c599-4572-8ded-5b4ee5f41ff1/20APS-IS-COVID-19-Public-P2.pdf) (<https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/5fbb4efe-c599-4572-8ded-5b4ee5f41ff1/20APS-IS-COVID-19-Public-P2.pdf>)
- Beyond Blue: [Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak) (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>)
- WHO: [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during COVID-19 outbreak](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_8) (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_8)
- Ted article: ["I'm incredibly anxious about coronavirus"](https://ideas.ted.com/dear-guy-im-incredibly-anxious-about-coronavirus-what-can-i-do/) (<https://ideas.ted.com/dear-guy-im-incredibly-anxious-about-coronavirus-what-can-i-do/>)
- Study Melbourne: resources and support for international students affected by COVID-19

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calming meditations, help with sleep, and at-home workouts or movement exercises.

Self-help programs

- [thedesk](https://www.thedesk.org.au/) (<https://www.thedesk.org.au/>)- free online program for Australian tertiary students to improve their wellbeing and study more effectively. There are four modules on how to stay calm, be more productive, and improve your wellbeing and relationships.

Check out the full list of recommended [mental health and wellbeing resources](https://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel/resources)

(<https://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel/resources>) on our website, including links to mental health information, self-help programs, and apps.

Further health and wellbeing support

Within the university

- [Counselling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](https://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel/home) (<https://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel/home>)
- [Health Service](https://services.unimelb.edu.au/health/home) (<https://services.unimelb.edu.au/health/home>)
- [Safer Community Program](https://safercommunity.unimelb.edu.au/) (<https://safercommunity.unimelb.edu.au/>)
- [Chaplaincy](https://services.unimelb.edu.au/chaplains/home) (<https://services.unimelb.edu.au/chaplains/home>)

Other phone or online counselling support services outside the university

Crisis support

- [Lifeline](https://www.lifeline.org.au/) (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>)- provides crisis counselling and suicide prevention services. Phone: 13 11 14 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). [Lifeline online chat](https://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat) (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat>).
- [Suicide Call Back Service](https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/) (<https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>) - provides online and phone counselling if you or someone you know is feeling suicidal. Phone: 1300 659 467. [Suicide Call Back Service online chat](https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling/) (<https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling/>).

General counselling and mental health support

- [Beyond Blue](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/) (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>)- online and phone mental health support. Phone: 1300 22 4636 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). [Beyond Blue online chat](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/online-chat).

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(<https://mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling/mensline-australia-online-counselling/>).

- [Mindspot](https://mindspot.org.au/) (<https://mindspot.org.au/>)- free telephone and online service for people with stress, worry, anxiety, low mood or depression. It provides online assessment and treatment for anxiety and depression and can help you find local services. Call 1800 61 44 34 (8am - 8pm, Monday - Friday; 8am-6pm, Saturday).

Specialist areas

- [1800Respect](https://www.1800respect.org.au/) (<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>)- confidential counselling, information and support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse via phone or online chat. Phone: 1800 737 732 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). [1800Respect online chat](https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome) (<https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome>).
- [Butterfly Foundation's National Helpline \(ED HOPE\)](https://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/our-services/helpline/over-the-phone/) (<https://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/our-services/helpline/over-the-phone/>) - confidential service that provides information, counselling, and treatment referral for people with eating disorders, and body image and related issues. Phone: 1800 33 4673 (8am - midnight).
- [Directline](https://www.directline.org.au/) (<https://www.directline.org.au/>)- confidential alcohol and drug counselling and referral service. Phone: 1800 888 236 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). [Directline online counselling](https://www.directline.org.au/online-counselling) (<https://www.directline.org.au/online-counselling>).
- [Switchboard Victoria](http://www.switchboard.org.au/) (<http://www.switchboard.org.au/>) - telephone and web counselling, information, and referral service for LGBTQI people. Phone: 1800 184 527 (3pm - 12am, 7 days a week). [QLife Webchat](https://www qlife.org.au/resources/chat) (<https://www qlife.org.au/resources/chat>).

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