

## MANAGING COVID ANXIETY

COVID-19 has brought about a series of challenges for mankind over the last two years. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have truly affected peoples' lives with loss of livelihoods, food shortage and disruptions in access to health services and education. It has led to an unprecedented increase in psychological distress and many people across age groups are reporting feelings associated with depression and anxiety. The social consequences and the economic fallout have come to impact mental health in a way that would linger on, even after the pandemic subsides.

As the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching implications continue to unfold globally, it is quite normal for people to experience a wide range of thoughts, feelings and emotional 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
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Feeling disconnected from others
- Apprehension about going to public spaces
- Trouble relaxing

If you are experiencing the above reactions, you are not alone. Many are grieving their loved ones who have died. Some survivors have been left with health problems, and many have lost jobs and businesses. Even the ones who have not experienced severe loss have faced months of disrupted schedules, cancelled milestones celebrations, and day to day changes. Due to all these challenges, people are left lonely, frustrated and vulnerable- physically, emotionally and financially.

As the societies and economies emerge from pandemic, following are the ways in which one can control anxiety, depression and keep negative thoughts at bay:

1. **Make a routine** – Maintain your day-to-day activities and routine. Having a healthy routine will have a positive impact on your thoughts and feelings. Even if you are in self-quarantine mode or working from home, it is very important to develop healthy habits. When the pandemic started, many people's days felt unstructured and monotonous, but more recently, that is changing and we are getting back to a new sense of normal and falling back into a structure. Get up at the same time each day. Get dressed. Give yourself at least one accomplishable goal to complete each day.
2. **Take care of yourself** – Engaging in self care is extremely essential. Get back to the basics. Eat healthy meals, take part in some or the other physical activity

(walking, stretching, running, cycling etc.), get enough sleep, take up a hobby or do things that you enjoy doing.

3. **Acknowledge your feelings**. It is okay to feel whatever you are feeling right now. Take out time to notice your feelings and express what you are feeling. This could be through journaling, talking with others, or channelling your emotions into something creative (e.g., drawing, painting, poetry, music), this can prove to be truly cathartic. Mindfulness meditation exercises is also a very helpful way to stay grounded in the midst of an emotional storm. Try to let your thoughts and feelings come and go in their own time, without getting overwhelmed by them.
4. **Stay Connected** – Please remember that physical distancing does not mean social disconnection. Receiving adequate support and care from loved ones can help 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.
5. **Set limits around news and social media** – It is very important to limit your usage or take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including those on social media. Though it is good to be informed, but hearing about the pandemic constantly throughout the day can be upsetting. Consider limiting news to just once or twice in a day and disconnecting from phone, TV, and computer screens for a while.
6. **Stay focused on the here and now**- Most of the time, our mind is dwindling between the past and the future. This creates a lot of uncertainty and negative thoughts. Try to focus on the here and now- not the past and not the future. Live in the moment and take one day at a time.

The pandemic has truly redefined the lives of billions of people across the world. Globally, humans have never felt so vulnerable, as they wait for the pandemic to end. Each family will now have a story to tell their future generations, of a dreadful illness, unexpected deaths, the lockdowns that transformed family and life values. Meanwhile, we have to continue our best efforts to contain the disease through the recommended measures and maintaining a positive environment at our homes and in our lives.

*Shenna Dhingra Sabharwal*

*Counselling Psychologist*