

Five tips to alleviate coronavirus anxiety

March 31 2020, by Anne Sliper Midling



You're not alone in being worried about the coronavirus and the future. Here are some tips to address these concerns. Credit: Colourbox

Many people are feeling anxious and fearful now that the virus is spreading, hospital admissions are increasing and society is shutting down for a few weeks, resulting in layoffs and unemployment.

You're not alone in feeling that way. But what can you do when your thoughts keep churning, and you can't get rid of the tightening in your chest?

"And let me add right off: This situation is going to improve."

"Follow the news and the instructions given by the authorities. That's the best coping strategy you can have," says Hans M. Nordahl, a professor in clinical psychology and behavioral medicine at NTNU.

"And let me add right off: this situation is going to improve," he says.

The larger perspective

Nordahl said it's natural to feel more worry, anxiety and discomfort right now.

"Paradoxically, the fear of corona might help curb the spread of infection, but the fear could also easily end up out of proportion and make people too anxious and stressed in their [everyday lives](#)," says Nordahl.

He believes that putting the current situation into a larger perspective can be helpful.

"Remember that this is a very special situation that we haven't experienced in the post-WWII period. This phase of our lives will be in the history books. History is being written now," he says.

"You're a part of this story. We're being exposed to a new downturn both in terms of health and the [economic situation](#). We've had economic downturns, layoffs and bankruptcies ten and twenty years ago too, but not a health problem like this one," Nordahl adds.

Big challenge, but not a catastrophe

"Think of this situation as a major [challenge](#) we have to face, but not as a catastrophe. If we follow the advice and guidelines we're getting from the authorities, we'll overcome this challenge. The more we support the guidelines, the faster we'll get through it," he says.

"Worrying isn't very useful for solving problems and instead inhibits activities that could solve problems. It's kind of like sitting in a mental rocking chair, swinging frantically back and forth, without getting anywhere."

"Challenges we can do something about. Worrying and catastrophic thinking can easily lead us to check our body and head for symptoms or discomfort, which in turn brings on feeling sick and anxious. Action is what's important now, and avoiding falling into the trap of worry and catastrophic thinking," Nordahl says.

The psychologist offers five tips for dealing with the corona fear:

(1) Be aware of the facts of the situation and when the [anxious thoughts](#) creep in. A fact-oriented approach is useful in uncertain times. You gain better and more effective control over the situation and minimize your catastrophic thinking.

Reminding yourself that you are fact-oriented implies checking out what is relevant and what you actually know about the corona virus, and not seducing yourself into focusing or speculating on the worst that could happen.

"If you view this situation as a challenge, then what is the most appropriate thing for you to focus on?"

(2) Catastrophic thinking creates worry and anxiety. What is the point of thinking of this as a disaster? If you view this whole situation as a

challenge, then what is the most helpful thing you can focus on?

For example, can you create a savings plan? If you're laid off, can you use the time to exercise a little more? How can you buy the groceries and other supplies you need within the applicable guidelines?

(3) A lot of people have problems coping with life's challenges, but worrying doesn't help. Worrying isn't very useful for solving problems and instead inhibits activities that could solve problems. It's kind of like sitting in a mental rocking chair, swinging frantically back and forth, without getting anywhere.

Worrying is about succumbing to worst possible outcome thinking. Worries arise and they create stress and turmoil. It's natural to be worried, but how appropriate is it to worry all the time?

"Think more about what you can do in this situation and get involved in activities you can do now."

You have the power to reduce your worrying and [catastrophic thinking](#). Can you become aware of your worrying and choose to reduce the time you spend on this activity?

(4) Concerns and anxiety can arise when you focus on future threats and dangers. Think more about what you can do in this situation and get involved in activities you can do now.

How about doing some spring cleaning? Or finally tidy up that storage closet? Wash the windows? Go for a walk? Paint the garage? Exercise outdoors? Do practical or useful things that you haven't had the time to do before.

(5) Feel free to share your concerns or feelings of anxiety with others if

you feel the need, but share other things that are important in your everyday life as well. Ultimately, it is you who decide what you want to focus on whether you're feeling anxious or not.

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