

## COVID-19 and Your Mental Health

A public health emergency, such as the COVID-19 outbreak, can be anxiety/stress inducing for some, especially for people who have a pre-existing medical condition, who are travelling, or are separated from friends and family members at home and abroad.

For individuals and communities who have to self-isolate, are choosing to socially distance themselves or who have otherwise directly been impacted by COVID-19, there may be heightened awareness, concern, anxiety and fear. For many, a sense of loss or feeling like you don't have control may be common. Try to be patient with yourself and others, because people may not cope like they usually do.

When you have no control over a stressful situation like a pandemic or emergency, having a plan and being emotionally prepared can help you stay calm, feel more in control and reduce stress. . In addition, using healthy coping skills to overcome daily challenges in your life is important to help you cope with your present situation and maintain good mental health.

### Helpful Tips:

- Limit the amount of time you spend watching, reading or listening to news about COVID-19. Seek information at specific times once or twice a day, for example once in the morning and once in the evening.
- Get the facts about COVID-19 from reliable sources such as <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#p22780s1>) or Health Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html> These sources of information will help you be able to tell facts apart from rumours.
- Focus on getting information that will help you take practical steps to protect yourself and your loved ones. Taking in too much or constant information about COVID-19 can cause you or those around you to feel worried or anxious.
- Be mindful, gently paying attention to your thoughts, feelings and body sensations. This can help you understand why you're feeling anxious or stressed. And it may help you to identify actions you can take to feel more in control. If you notice that you are reacting in ways that feel difficult to calm on your own, seek support from someone you trust and/or your healthcare practitioner
- Use healthy approaches and skills you normally use to cope with stressful situations. Keep up healthy behaviours that have helped in the past. Exercise, eating healthy, getting enough rest or sleep are all examples of healthy coping behaviours.
- Keep in mind that this situation is temporary, and eventually things will return to normal.
- Try to remain focused on the positive. There is effective care for COVID-19; people with COVID-19 are recovering and after recovering from COVID-19, will go on with their lives, including jobs, families and loved ones.
- Maintain your regular routines as much as possible. Focus on what needs to happen today, and make a list of what you need to do in the next day or week to keep yourself safe and comfortable. Keeping your regular household routine is important if children are confined to home. Encourage children to play and socialize with others, even if it is only within the family when advised to restrict social activities.
- During stressful times, it can be common for children to seek more attachment or be more demanding of parents. Discuss COVID-19 with children honestly using age-appropriate information. If children have concerns, addressing these concerns together may ease their anxiety. Holding and comforting your child helps them feel safe and secure as well. Reassure children especially at bedtime. Children will watch adult behaviours and emotions for examples on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.



- For parents and caregivers, try to model healthy and positive coping skills. Your child sees your emotions through your words, facial expressions and actions. How you respond to the stress of a pandemic can affect how your child reacts. Modeling calm and constructive reactions to the event will help your child feel calmer and cope better. It's okay to have strong emotions. Name them (e.g., "I feel frustrated." or "I feel sad."). Talk about how you feel and how you're going to cope (e.g., deep breathing, positive thinking) so your child learns how to do the same.
- It is important to think about what actions you can take to stay healthy and prevent the spread of COVID-19. If the illness becomes common in your community, your plan should consider how you will need to change your behaviours to reduce the risk of infection and what to do if you or someone in your family or household becomes sick. Visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html> to help you plan.
- Being prepared by having a plan can help you stay calm and feel more in control. Also helping others in their time of need can benefit them as well as you.
- Be sure to rest and try to get enough sleep. Lack of sleep can make you feel overwhelmed, which in turn will make it harder to cope with any impact you might be feeling because of COVID-19.
- Avoid or limit drinks with caffeine for example pop, coffee, tea and energy drinks because they can make you feel anxious or restless and affect your sleep.
- Avoid or limit drinks with alcohol, for example beer, wine and spirits (e.g., vodka, rum, gin). Using alcohol to cope with feelings of stress or anxiety is not advised as alcohol disrupts normal sleep patterns, can cause mood fluctuations and can make underlying feelings of stress and trauma worse.
- For those living with an existing mental illness (e.g., anxiety disorders like post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders like major depressive disorder and/or psychotic disorders like schizophrenia) no alcohol use is the safest choice as alcohol use can make symptoms of the mental illness worse.
- Breathing techniques can be an effective tool to manage stress and anxiety; take a slow deep breath in as you count to 5 and then exhale, also counting to 5 (repeat 10 times). This can help calm your nervous system and help you think more clearly.
- Find comfort in your spiritual/personal beliefs and practices.
- If you are in self-isolation, look for opportunities to stay in contact with family and friends. If health authorities advise or tell you to limit your physical or direct social contact to contain the outbreak, stay connected through phone calls and social media, such as text messaging, email, Skype, and face-time. Try as much as possible to keep your personal daily routines and engage in healthy activities you enjoy and find relaxing.
- If you decide to voluntarily socially distance yourself, consider spending time at home with friends and family; engage in activities that you can do together whether it's making and sharing meals, playing games or watching TV.

## Helpful Resources

- Health Link 811 or Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-303-2642
- Provincial 211 – provides referrals for community, government and social services
- Employee and Family Assistance Program – contact your Human Resources (HR) or your employer's provider
- Kids and teens can call the Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

