

## Coping with Worry and Anxiety about COVID-19

COVID-19 and the impact on New Zealand is unknown territory for all of us. It is perfectly normal and okay to feel anxiety when in a global pandemic. This can result in strong feelings, reactions, and changes in behaviour. There are a number of steps you can take to help yourself, family and children. Because of diabetes you may feel especially concerned, and this is understandable. When people with diabetes develop an illness it can be harder to treat because of fluctuations in glucose levels. However, you don't need to fear more than anyone else, preventative treatment and routine management is key.

### Key Points To Remember About Coping With Anxiety About COVID-19

- It is normal to have strong feelings, reactions, and changes in behaviour when faced with uncertainty
- People learn about how to cope and manage based on the responses of others, as well as what they see and hear in the media
- Limit the amount of information that you access and ensure you are only seeking accurate information
- Try to keep as many routines in place as possible, to provide a sense of safety and security
- Keep up social contact (even if physical contact needs to be limited) with your friends and family

### Psychological Impact of COVID-19

Everybody responds differently to events that are stressful. How you will react and respond will depend on your personal situation and background including your understanding about COVID-19, previous experiences with illness, and your community.

Common experiences for people faced with stress include:

- Worrying about your health and the health of your loved ones
- Sleep or eating pattern changes
- Concentration and attention difficulties
- Increased use of alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs

### What Can You Do To Help Yourself?

It is important to be aware of your own responses and emotional needs so that you can look after yourself and those around you. There are some strategies to help yourself and other.

### Be Calm and Kind to Yourself

Don't be hard on yourself if you are feeling more unsettled or worried than you usually do. Acknowledge that you are experiencing anxiety and be kind to yourself about that. Take deep breaths, meditate, practice relaxation, grounding, or mindfulness skills. Give yourself credit for coping how you are in a difficult situation.

#### 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

**5:** Acknowledge **FIVE** things you see around you. It could be a pen, a spot on the ceiling, anything in your surroundings.

**4:** Acknowledge **FOUR** things you can touch around you. It could be your hair, a pillow, or the ground under your feet.

**3:** Acknowledge **THREE** things you hear. This could be any external sound. If you can hear your tummy rumbling that counts! Focus on things you can hear outside of your body.

**2:** Acknowledge **TWO** things you can smell. Maybe in your workplace you can smell coffee or pencils, or maybe you are in your bedroom and smell a pillow. If you need to take a brief walk to find a scent you could smell soap in your bathroom, or nature outside.

**1:** Acknowledge **ONE** thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like—gum, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch?

### **Control Access to the Media and Limit Conversations about COVID-19**

COVID-19 is on every mainstream and social media platform. The information presented may not always be accurate which can increase anxiety and worry due to mixed messages or constantly hearing about the risks associated with COVID-19. Therefore, it is important to control how much access you have to the media. For children, their age and developmental level will affect how they can interpret the material that they see and hear.

When something is constantly talked about we focus on it more and then think and worry about it more, which increases our belief that we are more at risk, which is likely not to match the actual risk.

It is important to make sure that the information you access are coming from official sources including the Ministry of Health or your local DHB and Hospital.

Try and limit access to the news. Turn off alerts on phone so you are in control of the information you receive. Turn off the radio at time of news bulletins. Be comfortable and confident in asking your friends, family, or colleagues not to discuss the constant news around you or your loved ones. This will help you worry less and will also help others.

### **Make Sure What You Know Is Based On FACT**

Make sure you have read about the FACTS around COVID-19 from reputable sources and appropriate for New Zealand, as different countries are managing the pandemic differently. Ministry of Health updates their website daily. International Diabetes Federation and Beyond Type 1 have information about diabetes and COVID-19.

### **Stick To Healthy Habits, Routines and Family Systems**

Sticking to routines, including meal times and bed times as much as possible (even if on self-isolation). This creates a sense of safety and security. Ensure there are family or social based activities, as not having plans for the day can increase worry and anxiety. Activities (even virtual ones) can make you feel part of a unit and provide a sense of connectedness or togetherness. Make sure you are eating healthy, keeping up physical activity, don't use illicit drugs, avoid excessive smoking and alcohol use.

### **Taking Action**

Take action. This can create a sense of control and help if you are experiencing a sense of helplessness. Make sure you have an updated sick day management plan and have the appropriate supplies on hand. Programme into your phone the emergency numbers of people or health care services you can contact when you are unwell; don't hesitate to utilise them if concerned.

### **Access Support**

Talk to others about your feelings and what is going on; but be mindful about whether this is causing you more anxiety. Access support systems available to you and try to keep to as many routines as possible.

If you are already under a counselling or mental health service, then it is important to talk to them about more specific strategies.

Your GP is a good place to start. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can call or text **1737** to talk with a trained counsellor for free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For an online therapy programme for anxiety and depression check out [justathought.co.nz](http://justathought.co.nz)

### **References and Websites**

[www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz)

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.idf.org](http://www.idf.org)

[www.justathought.co.nz](http://www.justathought.co.nz)

[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

[www.beyondtype1.org](http://www.beyondtype1.org)

[www.1737.co.nz](http://www.1737.co.nz)

[www.anxietycanada.com](http://www.anxietycanada.com)

[www.jdrf.org](http://www.jdrf.org)

Healthline - 0800 358 5453 – For health-related calls about COVID-19

