



**MENTAL  
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# DEALING WITH COVID-19 ANXIETY

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Anxiety is generally a normal and useful emotion and only becomes a problem when it interferes with everyday life and the ability to carry out everyday tasks. Mental Health First Aiders can usefully apply the Mental Health First Aid ALGEE Action Plan to assist people who are experiencing troublesome anxiety.

Anxiety problems can often be managed with self-help methods. Here are some which are supported by experts:

## METHODS TO REDUCE ANXIETY

- Times of high anxiety can be relieved by exercise or progressive muscle relaxation.
- Mindfulness is also useful when feeling anxious: bring your attention to what you are experiencing at that moment, and non-judgementally observe your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
- Meditation (whether it be mindfulness meditation or another form) is good to do on a regular basis (i.e. not just as a way of coping at a time of anxiety). A lot of anxiety is caused by thinking about events that haven't happened yet and may not happen, and mindfulness can help with that.
- Also consider trying yoga, some forms of which include mindfulness.

## SEEK SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Supportive people can play an important role in managing or overcoming anxiety. It is a good idea to seek support from friends, family, or others.
- More specifically, it can help to talk about problems and feelings with a trusted person who will listen and understand.
- In the current situation, where social distancing is recommended to reduce the chances of infection, it is important that people do not become isolated. Social distancing doesn't mean social isolation. Phone, SMS and video chat services should be made use of at this time.

Many people will be feeling more anxiety than usual due to the COVID-19 situation. Being anxious at this time is a completely normal response to stressful events. As well as the possibility of becoming infected, many people will face other possible threats, including loss of income, shortage of supplies, unemployment, and social isolation. It is important to remember in this situation that anxiety is to be expected and, in most cases, will be an adaptive response that prepares people for action and protects them from danger. Anxiety is generally a normal and useful emotion!



Australia is fortunate to have some excellent online therapy that is freely available.

The following services provide evidence-based treatment for anxiety disorders:

**MindSpot** provides online therapy supported by a mental health professional. Treatment courses are available for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and other disorders.

[mindspot.org.au/about-mindspot](https://mindspot.org.au/about-mindspot)

**Mental Health Online** provides treatment for Generalised Anxiety Disorder, OCD, Social Anxiety Disorder, PTSD and Panic Disorder.

[mentalhealthonline.org.au](https://mentalhealthonline.org.au)

## ADOPT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

- Engage in regular aerobic exercise e.g. walking, jogging
- Spend time in contact with nature
- Maintain a regular sleep pattern
- Have regular leisure time e.g. pursuing a hobby
- Eat regular meals
- Reduce or eliminate use of alcohol and other drugs.

## CULTIVATE ACCEPTANCE

With the COVID-19 situation, there is a lot of uncertainty, which can contribute to anxiety. In such situations, it can be helpful to accept that there will be uncertainty and questions without immediate answers. All efforts towards acceptance can make a difference to how much a person is bothered by anxiety. It is possible to practice accepting uncertainty by:

- Not responding to the thoughts and feelings that go with it
- Recognising that it is part of life, bringing your attention to the present.

If anxiety gets out of control and cannot be managed with self-help methods and support from others, then professional help is warranted.

Because of the need for social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the increasing demands that will be placed on the health system, online therapies are a good point of initial professional help.