



## Managing Corona Virus (COVID 19) Anxiety

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*“Fear is a real thing, but it has no power over us except what we give it.” – Joyce Meyer*

It is obvious that anxiety and panic have taken over the world in light of the Corona Virus pandemic announcement. Even if you started off being relaxed about the situation, as you go to the store for simple grocery shopping and see all the shelves bare you start to wonder, “Maybe this is serious? Should I be hoarding supplies?” You may even get to the point that you think, “Am I going to die from this virus?”

When you watch schools and businesses shut down, the airline industry come to a virtual halt, and the stock market take a plunge, your initial fears may become further entrenched in your mind. If you try to argue with others about how this is “no big deal” and people are “over-reacting,” you may get pushback and be treated like some sort of naïve imbecile, with implications of, “Obviously we should all panic!”

For starters, I would like to encourage you to hold on to yourself and your own common sense. Is having a panic attack in this situation useful? If you worry “really really well” are you helping anything, let alone solving the problem? Obviously not.

**Worrying about anything is not useful.** Yes, anxiety is normal and people have it for a reason to help them be aware of danger in order to protect themselves, but chronic worry and panic does nothing but waste hours, days, or even weeks of your life with the false assumption that “If I worry, then the thing I fear won’t happen.” It is a delusion.

The problem with worrying about the Corona virus is that it becomes an obsession. Currently, it is a world-wide obsession, which is self-perpetuating and creates a culture of fear. It's almost a "condition."

Think about it this way, if you were to do research on the highest causes of death in the United States, you would discover that the highest cause of death is Heart Disease. Knowing this, do you obsess about your diet and amount of exercise and your cholesterol levels to a state of worry and panic every day because of this knowledge?

Here is a list of suggestions to help yourself cope with and manage your own anxiety:

### **Educate yourself on the facts.**

According to the Center for Disease Control as of March 10, 2020 (CDC Newsroom):

*As of today, there are more than 110,000 cases of COVID-19 worldwide. In the U.S., as of Sunday evening, 34 states plus New York City and D.C. have reported more than 500 cases of COVID-19 to CDC and 19 deaths. Nearly half of reported cases are in California and Washington. 18 of the deaths are in Washington. The remaining one is in California. Right now the states with the most cases are California and Washington. But other communities are also dealing with cases of COVID-19. That's why I'd like to talk to you today in greater detail about risk. Risk can be looked at in two ways. There is risk of being exposed and getting sick from this virus and there is risk of getting very sick or dying from illness with this virus. This virus is capable of spreading easily and sustainably from person to person based on the available data. The report of the World Health Organization mission to China describes the virus as being highly contagious. And there's essentially no immunity against this virus in the population because it's a new virus. Based on this, it's fair to say that as the trajectory of the outbreak continues, many people in the United States will at some point in time either this year or next be exposed to this virus and there's a good chance many will become sick. But again, based on what we know about this virus, we do not expect most people to develop serious illness. Reports out of China that looked at more than 70,000 COVID-19 patients found that about 80% of illness had — was mild and people recovered. 15 to 20% developed serious illness. Let's talk about who those people are. So far it seems like it's not children. Of the 70,000 cases, only about 2% were in people younger than 19. This seems to be a disease that affects adults. And most seriously older adults. Starting at age 60, there is an increasing risk of disease and the risk increases with age. The highest risk of serious illness and death is in people older than 80 years. People with serious underlying health conditions also are more likely to develop serious outcomes including death. The people who are at greatest risk are those older and who also have serious long-term health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease.*

Knowing the facts is helpful because you can learn to view the situation more rationally, rather than just reacting emotionally.

**Recognize how you “catastrophize.”**

In other words, when you worry about the Corona virus, your mind is playing a game with you by using your imagination (pretending) that the worst-case scenario is a reality. In essence, you are telling yourself a “worry sentence,” such as, “What if I get the virus and die?” According to David A. Carbonnell, PhD, (2016), this sentence means the same thing as, “Let’s pretend you’re going to get the virus and die.”

When your brain thinks in terms of “what if...,” because it’s (the brain) a problem-solving tool, it will start to generate solutions. This is where the obsessing and ruminating come in. Your brain is trying to solve the “what-if” scenario for you. This tendency is the process which steals your peace of mind.

Understanding what you are doing will help you stop doing it so much. In a way, you need to “call out” your brain on what it’s doing.

**Prescribe the symptom (The paradoxical approach).**

*“That which you resist, persists.”*

This approach involves the counter-intuitive approach of intentionally worrying about the problem. Pay more attention to your worry and focus your mind on trying to be “extra worried.” The paradoxical approach involves two basic principles: (1) Your efforts to directly increase anxiety will decrease it. (2) Your efforts to decrease anxiety will increase it (Carbonnell, 2016).

After you do this for awhile you will find it difficult to worry about the situation. In fact, you will most likely get annoyed and resist the desire to worry.

**Use the ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) Approach.**

This technique involves the question, “This thought you have about the Corona Virus – is it getting in the way of you doing anything important to you?” This approach involves having you look at your thoughts in terms of how they influence your behavior. Rather than looking at the validity or accuracy of the content of the thoughts, you look at how the thoughts affect your life.

The purpose of this approach is to help you examine your own, personal objectives, rather than being limited by negative and fearful thoughts. One aspect of this approach is to help yourself become more willing to live your life well in spite of your fears and insecurities.

In essence, you can learn to be tolerant of your uncertainties (e.g. fear of “what if I get the Corona virus?”) For instance, rather than believing that you must assuage your fears and beliefs about the Corona virus, you choose to live well in spite of these fears.

**Address your negative thinking.**

Once chronic worry sets in, it tends to hijack any other agenda you have for your life. It can take over all your plans, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. In essence, your life can revolve around your worry. You may also adhere to the belief that “If I expect the worst, I’ll be prepared.” This belief encourages you to constantly expect the worst outcome, reinforcing your worry.

Use “cognitive restructuring” to address this type of thinking. That means, change how you think. Tell yourself something encouraging, rather than allowing yourself to panic.

One form of cognitive restructuring involves “reframing.” For instance, reframe the idea of shutdowns and quarantines as being *cautions* rather than *crises*.

### **Deep Breathing.**

Breathe. Always remember that the best thing to do when you ever feel anxious is to take a long, slow, deep breath. Even one deep breath helps a person relax and feel better. It helps calm your amygdala and think more clearly.

### **Practice Good Hygiene.**

Last, but not least, is do what you can to take care of your health. Exercise, eat right, get enough rest, and practice good hygiene. The best practice is to wash your hands frequently using warm water and soap.

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