As humans, in the face of a crisis we can behave in strange ways. The irrational stockpiling that took place at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic shows us the level of anxiety uncertainty can cause. We start doing weird things, like staying up late reading news articles, being angry with an elderly parent for going shopping, or buying items of food you don’t even like that much ‘just in-case’. You might have even found yourself a bit tearful, finding it hard to sleep, getting into arguments with your children and partner, or restlessly reaching for yet another snack from the cupboard. Don’t worry, you’re not alone.

The Coronavirus pandemic has shown up unexpectedly, highlighting our individual and collective vulnerability and threatening our way of life. As the threat has increased, so has our sense of anxiety making us feel out of control.

When we are exposed to threats and danger that we need to deal with, the part of our brain called the amygdala springs into action. There are three reactions to the threat – fight, flight or freeze. When you are having a fight or flight response, your heart rate increases and your body fills with chemicals like cortisol and adrenaline. This makes you alert, your muscles tense up, your heart beats faster and blood flows away from any non-essential body system. In a fear situation, feelings such as anxiety become overwhelming and your body reacts, even if your conscious mind doesn’t.

Right now, many of us are being told to freeze and sit tight at home. Alongside that we’re being asked to make significant changes to how we do things like educate our children, work for our employers, shop for food and spend time with our families. We’re also having to take in a lot of information every day about a life-threatening virus at the same time our brain is shouting danger, danger, danger! This causes a lot of anxiety, fear and stress which can lead to feeling overwhelmed and result in changes to our behaviour.

The good news is there are some scientifically proven ways to calm yourself. Here are proven tips to help you find a sense of calm and peace during the coming months...
Create mood ‘lifts’

When we’re self-isolating we can begin to miss the lifts in our mood that normally happen throughout our day which we don’t usually to notice. It might be the walk to work, grabbing a latte from your local coffee shop, saying hello to someone you see every day, or popping in to see a loved one. All these lifts build up and when they are all taken away, they can have a big effect on your mood.

Create some new regular lifts that provide you with a sense of achievement. It might be walking the dog, listening to a Podcast, a new type of exercise, reading a chapter of book or take the time out to talk to someone.

Maintain a sense of routine

Whilst in the short term it might feel nice to be lazy, in the long term it isn’t good for your mental wellbeing. As far as possible, try to maintain as much of a routine as you can by waking up and going to bed at healthy times and getting at least 7 hours of sleep every night which will help you cope with stress during the day.

Take a shower and get dressed everyday - you don’t need to wear what you normally would to the office – but you do need to get out of your pyjamas. Your morning routine will play a large role in determining your mindset for the rest of the day and you’ll be more productive when you dress and brush your teeth.

Phone a friend

There’s a good chance you are currently staying home or under a curfew according to Government guidelines. That doesn’t mean you should completely isolate yourself, which will only increase any anxiety your might already be experiencing.

Don’t suffer alone - talk with your loved ones, friends, and colleagues to help reduce the isolating effect that social distancing may be having on you. And if you get one of those calls from someone, be kind and tell them they’re doing the best they can. If you’re feeling ok right now, call your friends and colleagues and check in on them, especially if they’ve gone quiet recently.
Our body holds onto stress as much as our minds, which is why you might be feeling aches and pains right now. Stretch out, dance, walk, run, play, do yoga and take a long hot bath or shower. Eat healthy balanced foods that you enjoy and look to limit your alcohol consumption (it’s a depressant and won’t help your mood or sleep).

Watch things that will make you laugh and inject a bit silliness with memes and jokes to release feel good endorphins.

Right now, there is coverage of coronavirus 24 hours a day, particularly on social media. Rumour and speculation can fuel anxiety. The World Health Organisation says:

“A near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates and practical guidance at specific times during the day from health professionals and avoid listening to or following rumours that make you feel uncomfortable.”

Consuming yourself with a constant stream of the news can scare you more and make things worse. Limit your intake to sensible sources you trust and the ‘need to know’ pieces.

Try to get exposure to the outside world and exercise within the Government advice limits. Our mental and physical health are linked, so setting a routine that includes exercise is important. Make the most of any private outdoor space as being in nature is calming and has a direct impact on our wellbeing.

If you can’t go outside, open the windows to let fresh air into the room and breathe it in. Look outside to watch and listen to the birds or tend to indoor and outdoor plants to engage with nature.
As well as washing them regularly, research has shown that the concentration needed to take on a tactile task can help centre the mind and give your brain a break from all those tangled messy thoughts.

Some ideas might include painting, drawing, writing, cooking, gardening, cleaning, de-cluttering, fixing things, playing cards, Monopoly, puzzles or Lego. Anything you need to focus on to get right.

This doesn’t include using your hands to scroll through your laptop or phone which isn’t the best way to spend long periods of time as it can be disruptive to your sleep and overall wellbeing.

Breathing exercises are something you can do at any time and from anywhere. Not only that, they work in minutes. Because of the all the physical reactions the amygdala triggers, rapid breathing is the only thing over which you have conscious control. When you control your breathing, you’re telling your body everything is ok and there is no danger. At that point all the other reactions in your body will start to slow down.

There are many different versions of breathing exercises which you can find online. Here’s a simple one to try:

- Breathe in through the nose and slowly out through the mouth.
- Make the outbreath longer than the inbreath – imagine there’s a candle in front of you and it mustn’t go out
- Breathe from the tummy, not the chest

Now see how you feel.
Most importantly...

Be kind to yourself

Don’t put pressure on yourself to learn a new language, start a diet or write a book right now. It’s going to be hard to concentrate and it could end up adding to your stress. Embrace the things that provide you comfort, like playing with your dog, watching your favourite film or box set, reading a magazine or book, or eating your favourite (healthy) snack.

For those doing whatever they can to help their children feel safe and secure, you might be worrying that maybe you should be doing more. Chances are you’re already juggling their schooling, maybe alongside your own work, preparing meals, cleaning everything, doing the washing and the dishes as well as checking in on other family members and friends.

Each family, each child is different and there’s no one ‘best’ way to do things. Rather than worrying about the right amount of screen time, the right things to say or the right things for them to be doing, reach inwards first and take care of your own emotional health. Only then can we listen to our children, validate their feelings and communicate as honestly as we can as the conditions change so they feel safe.

We’re all struggling and likely to have moments where we feel scared, angry, frustrated, anxious and might find someone else is too. Remember that these feelings are an unbalanced state of fear and in the context of this current crisis, it’s a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.
Got something else on your mind that you need help with? Email us at:

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