

Minding Your Mental Health During the Coronavirus Outbreak

(taken from the HSE website 23/03/20)

Infectious disease outbreaks like coronavirus (COVID-19) can be worrying. This can affect your mental health. But there are many things you can do to mind your mental health during times like this.

How your mental health might be affected

The spread of coronavirus is a new and challenging event. Some people might find it more worrying than others. Try to remember that medical, scientific and public health experts are working hard to contain the virus.

Most people's lives will change in some way over a period of days, weeks or months. But in time, it will pass.

You may notice some of the following:

- increased anxiety
- feeling stressed
- finding yourself excessively checking for symptoms, in yourself, or others
- becoming irritable more easily
- feeling insecure or unsettled
- fearing that normal aches and pains might be the virus
- having trouble sleeping
- feeling helpless or a lack of control
- having irrational thoughts

If you are taking any prescription medications, make sure you have enough.

How to mind your mental health during this time

Keeping a realistic perspective of the situation based on facts is important. Here are some ways you can do this.

Stay informed but set limits for news and social media

The constant stream of social media updates and news reports about coronavirus could cause you to feel worried. Sometimes it can be difficult to separate facts from rumours. Use trustworthy and reliable sources to get your news.

On social media, people may talk about their own worries or beliefs. You don't need to make them your own. Too much time on social media may increase your worry and levels of anxiety. Consider limiting how much time you spend on social media.

If you find the coverage on coronavirus is too intense for you, talk it through with someone close or get support.

Keep up your healthy routines

Your routine may be affected by the coronavirus outbreak in different ways. But during difficult times like this, it's best if you can keep some structure in your day.

It's important to pay attention to your needs and feelings, especially during times of stress. You may still be able to do some of the things you enjoy and find relaxing.

For example, you could try to:

- [exercise regularly](#), especially walking - you can do this even if you need to [self-quarantine](#)
- keep [regular sleep routines](#)
- maintain a [healthy, balanced diet](#)
- avoid excess [alcohol](#)
- practice [relaxation techniques](#) such as breathing exercises
- read a book
- search for online exercise or yoga classes, concerts, religious services or guided tours
- [improve your mood by doing something creative](#)

Stay connected to others

During times of stress, friends and families can be a good source of support. It is important to keep in touch with them and other people in your life.

If you need to restrict your movements or self-isolate, try to stay connected to people in other ways, for example:

- e-mail
- social media
- video calls
- phone calls
- text messages

Many video calling apps allow you to have video calls with multiple people at the same time.

Remember that talking things through with someone can help lessen worry or anxiety. You don't have to appear to be strong or to try to cope with things by yourself.

Talking to children and young people

Involving your children in your plans to manage this situation is important. Try to consider how they might be feeling.

Give children and young people the time and space to talk about the outbreak. Share the facts with them in a way that suits their age and temperament, without causing alarm.

Talk to your children about coronavirus but try to limit their exposure to news and social media. This is especially important for older children who may be spending more time online now. It may be causing anxiety.

Try to anticipate distress and support each other

It is understandable to feel vulnerable or overwhelmed reading or hearing news about the outbreak.

Acknowledge these feelings. Remind yourself and others to look after your physical and mental health. If you smoke or drink, try to avoid doing this any more than usual. It won't help in the long-term.

Don't make assumptions

Don't judge people or make assumptions about who is responsible for the spread of the disease. The coronavirus can affect anyone

regardless of age, gender, nationality or ethnicity. We are all in this together.

Online and phone supports

Face-to-face services are limited at the moment. But some services are providing online and phone services.

There are also many dedicated online services that can help.

Check all the services websites to see what online and phone supports are available.

OCD and coronavirus

If you have OCD, you may develop an intense fear of:

- catching coronavirus
- causing harm to others
- things not being in order

Fear of being infected by the virus may mean you become obsessed with:

- hand hygiene
- cleanliness
- avoiding certain situations, such as using public transport

Washing your hands

The compulsion to wash your hands or clean may get stronger. If you have recovered from this type of compulsion in the past, it may return.

Follow the advice to [wash your hands properly and often](#), but you do not need to do more than recommended.

Things you can do to help:

- limit your news intake and only use trusted sources of information
- keep taking any medication you are on
- practice [relaxation techniques](#) and [breathing exercises](#)