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A wellness newsletter from your local EFAP.

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Concern Without Panic

During these unprecedented and uncertain times wherein the world is responding to the threat of COVID-19, it is common for many people to experience anxiety of one form or another. Anxiety can be understood as part of the effort made by our minds and bodies to keep ourselves safe in the midst of a perceived threat (such as the COVID-19 virus). Anxiety makes us more alert to signs of threat and more ready to act in response to threats. Obviously keeping ourselves and those we care about safe is very important, so being alert and responsive is helpful for this endeavour.

Unfortunately, anxiety also has its drawbacks. Anxiety occurs outside our rational minds and so it often leads to problematic thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In the context of a pandemic, anxiety can lead to panic which, in turn, can lead to people hoarding groceries, accessing healthcare resources unnecessarily, or other behaviours that are ultimately unhelpful for society at large.

On the other end of the spectrum, some people respond to legitimately threatening circumstances by ignoring or downplaying the seriousness of the threat. In the context of a pandemic, this lackadaisical response can result in people ignoring the advice of governments and healthcare authorities who are trying to mitigate the threat of the pandemic. As with panic, behaviours that stem from carelessness can also be dangerous for individuals and society at large.

Therefore, it is likely most beneficial for us all to find the wise middle ground between anxiety and carelessness – especially in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a middle ground can be understood as having concern without panic.

What this looks like in practical terms is actively educating ourselves with advice from experts and responsibly following the guidelines laid out by government authorities. Taking these steps is what it means to have concern. It is understanding that there is a real threat present and we need to manage it effectively.

In addition, we will also navigate this problem most effectively by staying as calm as possible. Taking things seriously does not require anxiety and panic. When we act out of anxiety we lose touch with our rational minds and can behave in ways that are counterproductive. Taking time for self-care can be an important part of this step. Get outside as much as you can. Get adequate sleep, exercise and healthy nutrition. It can also help to restrict the amount of news media we consume as some news coverage can fuel anxiety. Lastly, try to take a little time whenever you can to be still and quiet and connect with your breath – you may be surprised at just how helpful this can be.

In closing, the COVID-19 pandemic is compelling everyone worldwide to make adjustments, make sacrifices, and rise up to meet the various challenges it presents. It is important that all of us act from a place of wisdom and concern rather than anxiety and panic in order to help keep ourselves and each other safe.

Take care and stay well!

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Change Your Daily Habits to Improve Anxiety

Whenever we work with clients experiencing anxiety, we try to get a well-rounded understanding of daily lifestyle habits (eating, sleeping, exercise, etc.). This is because lifestyle changes are simple and effective tools in the treatment of anxiety.

It's well-known that **exercise** is good for both mental and physical well-being, but how does it help anxiety specifically? Well, research shows that exercise can help ease anxiety by distracting us from the things we're anxious about, decreasing muscle tension, increasing the availability of anti-anxiety neurochemicals, and activating frontal regions of the brain which help us react appropriately to real or imagined threats.

When introducing exercise into your daily routine, we recommend choosing activities you enjoy doing, working towards including cardio, working out in a group or with a friend for the added social support, and taking it outside when possible. And, always consult with your doctor if you have any underlying health conditions.

What we **eat and drink** impacts how we feel. I'm sure many of us have felt the effects of too much coffee – feeling 'jittery', sweaty, or having difficulty concentrating, all of which are also symptoms of anxiety. If we consume things that mimic anxiety symptoms, we're likely to increase our overall feelings of anxiety because it's difficult to decipher whether it's the coffee or anxiety causing the jitters.

In addition to eating a balanced diet, staying hydrated, decreasing or excluding alcohol, caffeine, and other substances, research shows that eating complex carbohydrates (which metabolize slowly) helps balance blood sugar levels and create an overall calmer feeling.

Sleep also plays a major role in our experience of anxiety. Anxiety is known to negatively impact sleep and lack of sleep often aggravates anxiety. So how do we break this cycle? Start by looking at the two points above (what are you consuming and how are you moving?) Next, look at your sleep hygiene habits: What time do you go to bed? Do you keep a regular sleep schedule? How much screen time before bed? Etc.

If worrying at night tends to keep you up - relaxation techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation and meditation can help counter over-thinking or racing thoughts. Cognitive behavioural therapy can also help when you find yourself preoccupied with; not falling asleep, worries about being tired the next day, or frustrations about why you can't sleep or who is preventing you from sleeping.

As you can see, when it comes to anxiety, introducing small, manageable changes can have a big impact on how you feel. For more information specific to lifestyle choices and anxiety please visit these helpful websites.

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/can-exercise-help-treat-anxiety-2019102418096>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-strategies-to-ease-anxiety-201604139441>

https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/sleep-and-mental-health





Look for the Silver Linings

In times like this it is easy to feel burdened by negativity and worry. However, there are many positive things happening too, if you take a moment to find them. As the saying goes, “every cloud has a silver lining”. Here are a few examples that we came across this week.

The Himalayas become visible for the first time in years - According to [CNN](https://www.cnn.com), locals in the Punjab region of India have been able to see the Himalayas for the first time in decades due to reduced levels of pollution since India’s Covid-19 lockdown.

John Krasinski’s Some Good News - *The Office* actor has set up a video news show to share some of the good news he has read and seen with fans on YouTube, while also delivering some of his own. The show is complete with special guests and some rather touching moments. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOe_y6KKvS3Pd1fb9q9pGug/featured

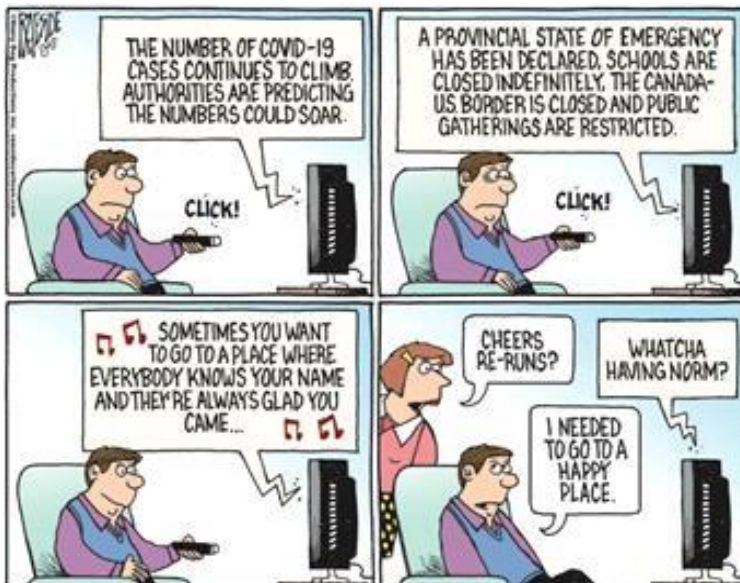
The canals in Venice are becoming clear – It has been reported that in Venice, locals have noticed how clear the water appears perhaps due to the lack of motorboats and general crowds and pollution. These clearer waters have even led to wildlife appearing in the canals with swans, fish and more spotted in recent days.

Concerts in your living room – For the music lovers out there, musicians from all different countries and genres have been organizing televised and streamed concerts for their fans. Billboard has a list of many of the upcoming events, but you can also find them in your TV listings and through web searches.

<https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/9335531/coronavirus-quarantine-music-events-online-streams>

Sing and dance alongs breaking out in Europe – A number of cities in Europe have seen spontaneous singing & dancing from windows and balconies. There are a number of videos online of these occurrences. It really does warm the heart! <https://youtu.be/DDRiINXik00>

Acts of Kindness – a couple in the UK who had to cancel their wedding plans, donated their 400 wedding reception meals to health care workers!



If you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious and would like to shift your perspective and mood toward something more positive, look for the silver lining in your situation. Reach out with an act of kindness or do an internet search for positive stories or funny videos. Sometimes just knowing that good things are happening in the world can help.

Online Resources



For some additional reading on anxiety check out these links:

<https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/covid-19-and-anxiety>

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19>

Wellness Together Canada <https://ca.portal.gs/>

CBC National News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtfWahLCyJg>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/can-exercise-help-treat-anxiety-2019102418096>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-strategies-to-ease-anxiety-201604139441>

https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/sleep-and-mental-health

There is an app for that:

Mindshift <http://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/>

Calm www.calm.com

Headspace www.headspace.com

Anxiety is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but it doesn't get you very far.

- Jodi Picoult

Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are.

- Theodore Roosevelt

Our anxiety does not come from the future, but from wanting to control it.

- Kahlil Gibran

Go easy on yourself. Whatever you do today, let it be enough.

- Unknown

Virtual Mental Health Supports During COVID-19

B.C. seniors, adults, youth and frontline health care workers experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic can get help through virtual services.

To support British Columbians of all ages during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province is expanding existing mental health programs and launching new services. To view these supports please visit <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-supports-covid-19>



HOW TO STAY CALM ABOUT

coronavirus



CHECK YOUR SOURCES



LIMIT YOUR RESEARCH



DECATASTOPHIZE



BE MINDFUL



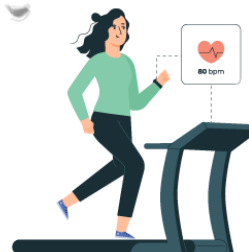
BREATHE



REST AND RECHARGE



EAT WELL



EXERCISE



WASH YOUR HANDS!!!