

## THRIVE GUIDE

# ANXIETY AROUND UNSETTLING TIMES

In light of the recent outbreak and government response, we wanted to remind everyone that you have free access to 24/7 mental health support. We have created this guide to help you understand how unsettling situations can lead to an anxious state and what you can do to effectively manage your stress and worries during this period of uncertainty.

## Stress VS Anxiety

**STRESS** is a **reaction** to an **external cause** which usually subsides once the situation is over.

- The stress response is a physical reaction to a perceived threat (heart rate increases, pupils dilate, stomach tightens).
- Positive effects of stress include adaptation and building resilience.
- However, long-term stress can cause issues for both our physical and mental health.
- Chronic stress can lead to heart conditions, digestion issues, weight gain, trouble sleeping, and mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

In modern life, the stress response is often caused by our own perceptions to situations that we encounter that aren't life threatening e.g. being late for a meeting or situations we imagine might happen and therefore worry about, e.g. losing our jobs. We often worry about things that are unlikely to happen and that are outside of our control. In these circumstances, our response to stress is not adaptive. Often, our response to a stressful situation is largely determined by how familiar we are with it and how prepared we feel to deal with it.

**ANXIETY** is caused by how we **perceive** stress. It's characterised by excessive and uncontrollable worry and physical symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, churning stomach, pins and needles, faster breathing or even panic attacks.

Our response to a stressful situation relies on many factors, including our social environment, our biology and - most importantly - our psychology. It is possible to learn effective ways of responding to stress to prevent it from becoming a problem. However, if you find yourself feeling overwhelmed with stress, you may need further support.





# Worries

**WORRYING** is a thought process where we become concerned about future events, assume negative outcomes and experience uncertainty. This is usually accompanied by a sense of dread or anxiety.

- Worry can preoccupy us, having a negative impact on productivity and mood.
- Worry is a very natural human reaction - 86% of adults consider themselves to be worriers.
- A worry can be real or hypothetical. It normally starts with a "what if" and spirals quickly from there. For example, "what if I lose my job", "what if I can't pay my rent" or "what if I get sick and can't work?". These often lead us to imagine the worst case scenario, which can intensify our worries further.

## Dealing with worry during a crisis



**Limit exposure to the news.** Pick reputable sources, such as the WHO, to stay up to date with the situation. Limit yourself to receiving news to once a day.



Try and **avoid social media**, especially for sources of information. Social media is a great way of staying connected with people, however it's also rife with negativity and false information.



**Stay connected** to people using video chats. Especially where work is concerned, it will be easy to slip into the habit of emailing, messaging or calling. You could even get really creative and hold "virtual cafes" or lunch breaks with your friends, teams and families.



Be strict about giving yourself time to **do things you enjoy each day**, whether that be reading, exercising, taking a bath or cooking. Most of you will have saved time on commuting by being forced to work from home, so use that time creatively and don't use it to work.



**Stay active and eat well.** Many gyms or online personal trainers are posting videos on home workouts. You can also access lots of resources on youtube, or even make them up yourself! You could even just go for a walk or run, ensuring the latest guidance permits you to do so.



## Managing Everyday Worries

Some practical tips for managing everyday worries. Most of us are pretty good at compartmentalising our worries day to day, but in a global crisis or period of uncertainty, our worries can be heightened and it can be difficult to shut them off, so it's good to know what you can do to manage this.

### Worry time

Worry can feel hard to control. Rather than trying to stop it all together, one technique is to schedule "worry time" where you can dedicate time to think about your worries. Anytime a worry comes to mind, take a minute to write it down. During your "worry time" sort the worries into things you can and can't do something about. Those you can do something about make a brief plan to deal with them or schedule some time when you can deal with them effectively. Whilst this technique doesn't necessarily 'solve' your worries, it does limit the amount of time you spend thinking about them, meaning that they don't overwhelm you.

### Ask yourself, "what then?"

Often our worries are hypothetical, e.g. "what if I lose my job," and it's common to get stuck at the worst part of the scenario, without thinking about what would happen next or what we would do about it (I'll use the feedback to go for the next one, I'll look for another job, I'll go to the doctors and speak to my line managers). Facing the worry in this way, i.e. what would you do and how would you cope, can take some of the heat off it. When we work through our worries in this way, we often realise we could cope better than we initially expected.

### Prioritise the present

Sometimes, we can get stuck worrying about things in the past or future. Mindfulness is about learning how attention gets captured by thoughts, particularly worries and learning that you don't need to engage with these thoughts, achieving more conscious attention control. The Thrive: Mental Wellbeing app has a variety of techniques that you can try - Calm Breathing, Deep Muscle Relaxation and Applied Relaxation all which focus on the mind-body connection - sometimes if we cannot control our mind it's easier to gain control of the sensations in the body and control the mind that way in turn.