



MEDIA EXPOSURE AND ANXIETY

Tips for How to Manage Your Experience of COVID-19

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The coronavirus (which causes the disease officially named COVID-19) has been declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO), which often brings feelings of uncertainty, fear, anxiety and worry to many of us and to our families. It can also lead to changes in mood and behavior. Some may experience a need to "do something" but you don't know what to do. Others may feel a low mood and feel sad or hopeless.

Media Affects Us More Than You Think

Too much media of any kind can undermine or damage mental health. There are strong correlations between the amount of media one consumes and the amount of fear and anxiety and acute stress that people experience. It may be helpful to reduce your intake of media and news related to COVID-19. Research from various natural disasters and terrorism has shown that people that watch multiple hours of media vs. those that consume less than an hour of media per day show far fewer symptoms. So, the volume of media you consume matters to your mental health.

What You Can Do

Limit social media.

Research has shown that social media can escalate anxiety more than traditional media. Social media discussions of the virus may have inaccurate information and can create anxiety when comparing your response to others (stockpiling food, leaving the state/country). Social media has also been shown to increase fear responses rather than helpful coping responses such as washing hands or taking precautions. Social media can leave one with a sense of fear and negative emotions and without a sense of what to do about it. In addition, social media often involves sharing of images that can be provocative. For example, viewing people in hazmat suits or very sick people in a hospital bed can produce more anxiety than is helpful. It also can distort your view of the world and may not show you the people with COVID-19 who are coping well and on the path to recovery.

Limit daily news media.

Limiting your exposure to news and turning off news notifications may decrease anxiety and negative emotions. Checking the latest news media or CDC updates 1-2 times a day is sufficient for most people. For the rest of the time, if worries come up about this or an urge to check the news - put it off for later.



Look for trustworthy information sources.

Look for credible sources of information such as the CDC and reputable news sources.

Keep this moment in history in perspective.

Compared to other pandemics this is less dangerous than others such as the “Flu of 1918” where tens of millions died and the healthcare system was much poorer than it is today. As such, we are much safer than during past pandemics.

Prioritize time for strategies to manage anxiety .

Use relaxation techniques, stretching, yoga, mindfulness apps on your mobile device, and exercise.

Focus your attention on things within your control.

It can be helpful to focus your attention on tasks that you can control and scheduling some activities that bring some degree of pleasure/joy and that challenge you (providing mastery).

For more information or counseling support please email: support@headington-institute.org.