

# Opinion: 11 Things You Can Do To Manage Your Coronavirus Anxiety

By Deborah Sosin, 3/13/20, wbur news

So much fear. So much worry. So much information to absorb and assess. And for those of us who tend toward excess worry and anxiety anyway, news of the coronavirus pandemic is like a rotten cherry atop a melting ice cream sundae of stress accumulated over the past several years.

Anxiety can be a good thing – warning us to act in the face of danger, keeping us from taking unnecessary risks. But is extreme concern over coronavirus serving us in any way?

Let's assume that you've been following the latest and know the basics about good hygiene and social distancing. You're getting your information from reliable sources such as the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. You're doing the best you can to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community by making wise, considered choices. And yet you're still a nervous wreck.

Much of what can fuel extreme anxiety is the sense of being helpless and out of control. It makes sense. There's nothing worse than feeling that no matter what we do, bad things might happen anyway. Yet, that is a fundamental existential truth and always has been – it's just that now it's in our face 24/7.

So how can we cope right now? Today? Here are 11 tips for managing your coronavirus anxiety. They won't make the problem go away, but they may help you feel more grounded and, yes, in control?

- 1 – **Tune out.** You can stay abreast of the news but you really, really, really don't have to monitor every single development.
- 2 – **Stop what you're doing and take three (more more) conscious breaths.** Feel the air going in through your nose. Inhale deeply, filling your lungs. Exhale slowly through pursed lips. Repeat as needed throughout the day (and night)
- 3 – **Put your hand on your heart** or both hands crisscrossed on your chest, press gently and feel the warm sensation. Close your eyes and tell yourself, "This is hard, but I'm doing the best I can."
- 4 – **Go for a walk.** Notice the buds on the trees, the sprouting flowers, the passing clouds. If you want to focus on something, isolate, say, a certain color in the environment – the red fire hydrant, the red mailbox, the red car and so on. Or simply notice all the sounds you can discern. Giving the mind something to do relaxes the activity in the amygdala, the fight-or-flight part of the brain, and it calms the nervous system.
- 5 – **Laugh.** For no reason. There's actually a name for it: Laughter Yoga, a stress-reducing, immune-boosting practice. I do it in my car when I notice I'm holding my breath or obsessing about

something. The point is, you don't need a humorous stimulus to generate laughter. It's contagious. (The good kind of contagious.)

6 – **Give yourself permission to change the subject.** Call a friend. Talk about anything besides anxiety, illness, politics. Be silly. Be superficial. Share memories of past fun times.

7 – **Download a meditation app** such as Headspace, Insight Timer, Calm or dozens of other resources online.

8-**Do a project** – it could be cleaning, organizing, cooking, writing, artwork, building something, doing a craft, a crossword or jigsaw puzzle. The mind wants to focus, relax.

9 – **Listen to calming music.** Or, if you prefer. Listen to rousing music and get up and dance – moving is vital to managing stress and anxiety.

10 – **Volunteer** to help others in need – deliver food, drop off supplies, check in with elders by phone. Being altruistic can improve your mood and benefit others at the same time.

11 – **Remind yourself that life will go on.** Whatever the “new normal” is, we will adjust.

You are not alone,