

Three Things to Do When It Feels Like COVID-19 Will Never End

October 1, 2021

This document was prepared on October 1, 2021 by Natalie Garrison. Natalie works for North Yorkers for Disabled Persons as an Outreach Communication Facilitator, Information Referral and Resources Support. She can be reached at natalie.nydp@gmail.com. These tips are meant to be a source of support and do not replace medical advice.

“I am scared COVID will never be over.”

This week, we received this message through our website, and we decided to explore it in a separate post so that more people can see it! If it's any comfort, a lot of people are struggling with the same worry. If you feel like there is no end in sight, you are not alone.

This article will explore what feeds this fear and offer suggestions to manage it. Since we're all different, not every suggestion will work for you. You might have to try a few new things before you feel less anxious. Be compassionate towards yourself and try to keep an open mind.

The Problems

The problems caused by the pandemic need no introduction. You may have felt more hopeful after getting vaccinated, only to be confused and devastated by the news of breakthrough cases. In addition to the fear that the disease itself will never go away, we're all confronted with our lack of control over the situation and the lack of certainty about the future. Click [here](#) to read another article by us about ways to cope with uncertainty.

It's bad enough that the situation is out of our control, but many people have felt their inner world and thoughts spiralling out of control, too. Anxiety takes a toll on the body, especially considering that the last year has been an emotional rollercoaster.

What's more, we can't escape reminders of the virus as it's always on the news. Even with no shortage of news stories, there are still more questions than answers.

What You Can Do

1. Set Limits on How Often You Check the News

Many of us, myself included, have followed the news more closely in the past year than ever before. I think that the more you expose yourself to the news, the longer the pandemic feels. It's important to be aware of public health advice and the general situation in your area so that you avoid catching and spreading the virus. That said, there is a limit to how much news you can consume before it harms your mental health. As I mentioned earlier, everyone is different, so it's okay if your limit is higher or lower than others around you.

According to John-Paul Davies, a London-based psychotherapist and spokesperson for the UK Council of Psychotherapy, “the thing about anxiety for people generally is that it pushes us to check [the information], to try and relieve anxiety.”* However, the news is usually presented in a way that scares you so that you keep watching or visiting their website, so it fuels the fear rather than easing it.* This cycle impacts everyone, especially people with a history of mental and emotional health issues.*

Try setting a specific time of day when you check the news, like at lunchtime.* You can also limit yourself to a specific amount of time, like 30 minutes.* This could help prevent your negative thoughts from spiralling. See how you feel after experimenting with different times of day and lengths of time; you can always adjust your routine.*

Also, “if you’d feel better avoiding media entirely, ask someone you trust to pass along any major updates you need to know about.”* You can ask a friend to summarize the news for you. If you don’t know who to ask, you can find our daily updates [here](#), and if you want, you can always ask us questions, which we will answer anonymously.

At North Yorkers for Disabled Persons, we’ve been trying to ease pandemic anxiety by providing short daily updates with factual and relevant COVID-19 information from a variety of credible sources. We remove the sensationalist and overly political language that often comes with pandemic news so that you can get the facts without the drama! We hope this helps you cut down on how much time you spend checking the news.

2. Make Peace with the Fact that You are Not in Control

The fact that the pandemic is still happening, even after we’ve done everything we can to stop the virus’ spread, forces us to confront the fact that most things are out of our control. For some, this concept is more frightening than the idea of getting sick.*

This quote by [Elizabeth Gilbert](#) has really stuck with me: “You are afraid of surrender because you don’t want to lose control. But you never had control; all you had was anxiety.”*

Worrying makes us feel like we’re doing something about the situation and gives us an illusion of being in control. Have you ever been up late at night thinking of possible scenarios? For example, asking yourself “What would I do if *this* happened? But what about if *that* happened?” We might imagine what would happen if we got infected, lost our source of income, or lost someone we loved. Subconsciously, we might believe that thinking about it is a way for us to stay vigilant and be protected from it happening to us in reality.

It’s completely normal to have endless “what if” thoughts about all of these things, especially at a time when we’re more aware than ever that nothing is in our control. But even though this thinking pattern common and you shouldn’t judge yourself for it, you should still try and change this habit because “as long as we’re focusing on questions with unknowable answers and circumstances outside of our personal control, this strategy will get us nowhere—aside from feeling drained, anxious, and overwhelmed.”*

Of course, it's much easier said than done. When you can't stop "what if" thinking, focus on your breathing.* You can inhale for four seconds, hold your breath for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, hold your breath for four seconds, and repeat. It doesn't have to be exactly four seconds; it could be any number that feels comfortable for you. This exercise has many names, but it's a common technique recommended for people who are feeling anxious.

At first, it's stressful to think that we don't have, have never had, and will never have control or certainty about the future, but accepting this truth can greatly reduce our feelings of dread. Making peace with uncertainty is in line with a number of religious and spiritual teachings across the world. Learning about diverse opinions on this topic might be a meaningful way to take your mind off the pandemic.

3. Celebrate the Small Stuff, Take Breaks from Thinking about It

For some, these past 19 months have flown by, and for others, it's felt like much longer than that. Both parties are eagerly looking forward to this all being over, but why is our sense of time so "off"? Lockdowns have interrupted one of the major ways we keep track of time: celebrating holidays and personal milestones. It doesn't seem like an appropriate time to celebrate, but we should find things to celebrate anyway (while still taking precautions).

You could celebrate small milestones, decorate your home for different seasons, and watch seasonal movies and shows! If you are fully vaccinated and feel comfortable with it, you can go to outdoor events with measures put in place to reduce the spread of the virus. No matter what you do, take lots of pictures of day-to-day life. Looking back on those photos can help you regain a sense of time.

A final word of advice: "Don't let coronavirus dominate every conversation. It's important to take breaks from stressful thoughts about the pandemic to simply enjoy each other's company—to laugh, share stories, and focus on other things going on in our lives."*

Final Thoughts: Want more help, but not sure where to look?

There are more things that you can do to manage your feelings about the pandemic, or anything else related to your mental health. Click [here](#) to check out free and low-cost programs funded by the province, which you can do in real time or any time.

That link also includes information about [BounceBack](#), a free skill-building program to manage symptoms of mild to moderate anxiety and/or depression. It's not a counselling line, but they will help you overcome these symptoms and gain new skills via telephone coaching, workbooks, and online videos. It's free to anyone in Ontario who's 15 years old and up.

There are a number of crisis lines across Ontario. Click [here](#) to search for resources in your area. If you feel overwhelmed by the number of resources, contact [ConnexOntario](#) and they can help you navigate the system and provide information about counselling services and support services in your community.

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675