**BACP Coronavirus & Anxiety**

Coronavirus is dominating headlines around the world. While the media focus is on the impact on people’s physical health and what’s being done to prevent the spread of the disease; anxiety about the virus can also have an impact on people’s mental health and wellbeing.

The virus causes flu-like symptoms including a fever, a cough, or difficulty breathing and the government says the current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild.

But with blanket news coverage – including of deaths in other countries, whole towns being locked down abroad, and stories of people being kept in quarantine or having to self-isolate for weeks, there is understandably a lot of anxiety about the virus.

“The main thing is it’s an unknown threat,” says our member Elizabeth Turp.

“The way that it’s being portrayed is connecting with the fear centre in our brain; our underlying fears. Nobody wants to feel more under threat of death.

“This is very real. It’s something that will come up in therapy,” she adds.

Our member Catherine Gallacher adds: “The media, the television news brings this right into our living rooms, so this feels very close to home, even if it’s not.”

The [Government has issued advice](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public) about what to do if you feel unwell, have been to any affected areas and has guidance on how to prevent the spread of disease.

Here are some of our members’ suggestions who can help if you are feeling anxious about the spread of the virus.

**Think about access to media and social media**

“Some people can be quite paralysed by this anxiety and may want to completely stop interacting with the news,” says Elizabeth, a counsellor in Liverpool.

“But for others this can be quite difficult. They want to know what’s going on. Not knowing makes it worse.”

She says think about limiting how much time you spend on social media or reading, listening or watching the news.

You may want to think about where you are getting your information from. Are the reports sensationalising the situation and scaremongering? Or do you feel they are reporting responsibly and with balance?

**Don’t ignore your anxiety**

“It’s very normal to feel scared about something like this,” adds Elizabeth. “Acknowledge that you feel this way. Don’t ignore these feelings.”

Exploring why you feel this way can help.

A counsellor can help you do this.

**Do something you can control**

It can help to express this anxiety in a way that you can control. That could be writing down what you feel, or keeping a journal, adds Elizabeth.

**Let it go**

Once you’ve written it down, let it go, she adds.

 “Allow yourself to worry, put it down in writing in a notebook, and then put that away. Let it go,” continues Elizabeth.

**Bring it back to the present**

“With anxiety, it’s often like you’re 10 steps ahead, so bring things back to the present,” says Elizabeth.

**Think about your thought process**

Catherine echoes this.

**“**Be really aware of what you’re thinking. Sometimes we are catastrophising, we're focusing on all these ‘what ifs?’ Bring things back to what you actually know.”

“Reassure yourself, calm yourself. We call it self-soothing,” she adds.

**Wellbeing check**

Make sure you are looking after yourself, doing what you can to help get a good night’s sleep, eating well and doing exercise, adds Catherine, who is based in Glasgow.

“I always talk to my clients about a wellbeing check. Sleeping, eating, exercising. If we manage our health like this, it can help make us more robust against anxiety.”

**Self-management**

Elizabeth, who often works with people who have long-term health conditions, says it’s important to make sure you are doing the usual self-management of your condition.

Anxiety and the release of stress hormones can exacerbate physical symptoms, she adds.

“Anxiety links our brain and body. Make sure you are doing what you can to look after your physical health.”

**Breathing techniques and mindfulness**

And Catherine recommends practising mindfulness or using breathing techniques to help you relax.

“These can be helpful in managing anxiety. They are good tools for dealing with nervous feelings.”

Read the [Government’s latest information and advice](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public) regarding coronavirus.

The NHS also has [information about the virus,](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/common-questions/) what you can do to prevent its spread and what to do if you worried that you might have symptoms.

**To find a counsellor or psychotherapist who can help you with anxiety visit our** [**Therapist Directory**](https://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists?q=anxiety)**.**