



DISASTER ANXIETY

*Mental health during national and global
disasters*

In today's world of instant access to digital information, news and social media, it can be a challenge to keep our anxiety in check when facing global or national disasters.

Uncertainty can leave most of us feeling more stressed or anxious than usual. When the uncertainty relates to emergencies, disasters or health epidemics, taking care of our emotional wellbeing is really important as it helps us to meet these challenges in the healthiest way possible. Responses to disasters or epidemics can provoke heightened stress, anxiety or fear. This is really normal and you are not alone. In normal circumstances, these feelings can tell us we need to act. We also experience them however when situations are uncertain or unfamiliar. Planning how we want to deal with these feelings will really help us to support ourselves and each other as we move through these situations together.

Strategies often suggested

- Take time away from social media or mainstream news
- Take time to exercise
- Talk to friends or family
- Get enough sleep
- Meditate
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Make time to unwind
- Slow breathing
- Cut back on coffee or foods/drinks that make you feel jittery
- Plan "worry time"
- Learn from others through talking about your experiences or joining a support group
- Be kind to yourself if you are feeling anxious rather than being harsh
- Learn to plan instead of worrying

Blocks

Below you will find three common blocks (barriers and misconceptions) that can prevent us from responding calmly to natural disasters and epidemics.

I must keep up to date with the media

Most people will feel the pressure to be up to date as it tells us we are responsible and value wellbeing. It is important to balance this against the impact of "newsreel fatigue" and obtaining news from reputable sources. When we read distressing news, our amygdala lights up and we activate our fight/flight/freeze response and flood our bodies with stress hormones. Our bodies can't remain in these hyper-aroused states forever so we become fatigued, overwhelmed and burnt out. Unless specifically directed by your local emergency service, checking the news once or twice a day is enough to stay up to date with developments. This then gives us the chance to refocus on things we can control as the situation unfolds.

Breathing isn't going to change anything

Breathing changes everything! Yes, it won't change the situation but it gives us the strength and resolve to take sensible and reasonable actions that help us through these times. We don't need to go anywhere special or buy any special equipment to make use of our breath. Taking a few deep and controlled breaths is a great circuit breaker for anxiety and helps bring us back into the moment, a moment where we can choose to struggle or choose to roll with it.

I can't stop worrying

Worry is our minds way of trying to find a solution. In times of uncertainty, the big solutions are still to be uncovered but discoveries happen continuously. Whilst we wait, what are the little solutions in our lives we can put into action. Accessing information from reliable sources is a great place to obtain the recommended actions during a crisis (it might be hand washing, property preparation, or changing how we connect with each other). Taking action is a really positive way of addressing worry. Try it!

Boosters

Below are three things you can do to boost success.

Take control

Ask yourself, "what can I have control over in this situation?" and focus in on this list. There are many individual actions which, when we all do them, impact on the outcome of disasters or epidemics. Worry doesn't disappear when we make a plan but it often reduces when we take action. We can also control how we manage our time or energy in ways that support rather than drain our wellbeing. For example, controlling time spent on social media or mainstream news, increasing creativity around how we engage in social or leisure activities and prioritising the fundamentals (eating, sleeping and hydrating).

Use reliable sources for information

The world is awash with information and it's available 24/7 at our fingertips. Make your "media time" count and consult factual, unbiased sources that give you the information minus all the hype. Check out the resources list below for examples that may be relevant to today.

World Health Organisation - <https://www.who.int/>

World in data - <https://ourworldindata.org/>

Australian Government - <https://www.australia.gov.au/>

Boost your mood

Human beings can be incredible resilient, kind and generous. Responding to ourselves, our neighbours, our friends and our families with kindness and compassion reminds us that we are a community, and we can support each other. Connecting with our values, our sense of purpose and things we do for fun can really help to boost our moods. If we enjoy exercise then do something to get the blood pumping. If we are creative then make something. Don't underestimate the humble laugh. Connect with friends or watch some comedy which can go a long way towards lifting our moods. Think creatively and utilise video calls, zoom chats, phone calls, letter writing, there are lots of inventive ways that people can connect to meet our social needs and care for our wellbeing in extraordinary times.

Need more info?

Explore other information on the Wellbeing Hub – <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/student/wellbeing/>, including the pages on Mental Health, The Breath and Mind & Body.

Counselling Support is available to assist students with personal difficulties that are affecting their study.

The service provides:

- Individual Counselling by appointment
- Telephone Counselling by appointment
- Mental health emergency response

Counselling Support

Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building

The University of Adelaide

Ph: +61 8 8313 5663

After hours support: 1300 167 654 or sms 0488 884 197

This pamphlet was written by Counselling Support, The University of Adelaide

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