

TOP 10 LIST

COVID-19 Anxiety Reduction Strategies

During this time of national crisis, we must manage two things simultaneously: 1) Protect ourselves from the Coronavirus, and 2) Protect ourselves from anxiety. If your anxiety, fear, and worry has been overwhelming, put these ten strategies into practice.

1. Media Distancing: To stop the spread of COVID-19, we've had to practice social distancing. But to stop the spread of anxiety, we must distance ourselves from the media. All anxiety stems from uncertainty and an active imagination which produces catastrophic thoughts. The media, which is 24/7 Coronavirus and virtually all negative, is the driver of those thoughts. (The CDC estimates that the flu this season has killed between 24,000 and 62,000 people in the United States. We are not panicking because the flu is familiar and the media does not give it attention). My patients who are the most anxious about the Coronavirus are those who are consuming the most news from social media, online, and traditional outlets. The more anxious you feel, the more you should distance from the media. And if you are extremely fearful, stop watching and reading altogether. Do no Google or research. Stop checking the latest news about the virus (as well as your investments). Any vital information you need to know, you will find out.

2. Do Not Engage with Worry. Take Action: Whether you are worried about contracting the virus, your struggling business, or being unemployed, the more your mind focuses on worst-case scenarios, the more anxious you feel. You can't stop thoughts from entering your mind, but you can choose to stop dwelling and you can choose to take action to solve problems. There is a huge difference between worrying and problem solving. When your mind tries to bait you into worry, don't take the bait. If you do, like a fish in a lake, you will be caught. Anxiety will try to bait you with many "what if" questions. Don't answer them. Respond, "Not taking the bait," turn your attention away, and focus elsewhere. Spinning your wheels with questions that don't have answers will take you down the rabbit hole of fear. Instead, find creative measures to get you through this storm until you can get back on your feet. None of these measures will be comfortable. Like an umbrella and a raincoat, we use them to get through the storm, not to stop it. Much of anxiety stems from a lack of confidence in our ability to handle challenges. Push yourself to take one uncomfortable step at a time. With financial stress these steps might include seeking out loans, asking for help, paying portions of bills, cutting back on spending, and finding creative ways to make money including selling items on Ebay. The goal is to stay afloat until the storm passes.

3. Focus on Present Odds: All deaths are tragic, but we must maintain proper perspective. The vast majority of people infected with COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms or no symptoms at all. And the mortality rate if you do contract the virus ranges from 1.4% to 3% (The exact mortality rate is unknown at this time). The number of deaths will continue to climb (and the news will report every one) and yet, the chance of you or a loved-one dying is still remote, especially with everyone's effort to maintain distance and isolate. But death is possible and that's why anxious people take the bait and dwell. Possibility becomes probability. Remind yourself of the present odds, which are very good. After all, if

you went to Vegas and had a 97% chance of winning, you would be excited to take those odds. If you take care of yourself properly, even if you are in a higher risk category, your risk of death is still low.

4. Do Not React to Physical Symptoms: If you cough, it does not mean you have the COVID-19. The same is true for others who cough. Allergies, bronchitis, post-nasal drip, and the cold are more common and a more likely explanation. Accept uncertainty as you do in other areas of life and assume what is most likely. Do not scan your body looking for symptoms. This behavior reinforces your worries and will increase anxiety. And if you are worried about your investments, stop checking those as well.

5. Focus on Being Productive and New Ways of Enjoying Life: Although we have no control over the national crisis, we must focus on where we do have control – our response to the crisis. This is an opportunity to try something new and do things we haven't had time for. Organize a messy room, paint a fence, clean the garage, edit the photos on your phone, clean a rusty bike and take it for a ride, and play a board game — remember those? You can also learn a new skill or start a new hobby from videos on YouTube or various apps and websites. My son, who hasn't played piano in six years, downloaded a free piano course and is practicing once a day. Creating and accomplishing puts your attention on what is satisfying. Consider starting something new: genealogy, gardening, photography, knitting, drawing, cooking, woodworking, video editing, ballroom dancing, or chess, just to name a few. You can start and learn all of these online. Put your attention on creating and accomplishing, not on the virus or being unemployed.

6. Engage in Stress Reduction Activities: Focusing on what you are grateful for, exercising your body, and relaxing your mind will help give you the peace you desire. Guided meditation, yoga, exercise, and a gratitude journal are all practices that lower stress. Select one or two, learn about them so you do them correctly, and practice each day. If you and your loved ones are not severely sick or experiencing dire financial hardship, be grateful. Once this crisis has passed, perhaps we will all appreciate what we take for granted: a healthy society, freedom to gather, dinner with friends, a night at the movies, and a simple haircut.

7. Do Not Go Beyond CDC Guidelines: Compulsive hand washing until your hands are dry and red, taking off all of your clothes before entering the house, and isolating indoors are anxiety's guidelines, not the CDCs. Check the CDC for appropriate measures.

8. Preserve Some Sense of Normalcy:

During World War II, second-tier baseball players filled in for the professionals who were entering the army. Baseball, during a time of war, was important for the morale of the country. To the extent you can, maintain your day as you normally do with modifications. Be creative. Instead of exercising at the gym, workout inside your home or in your neighborhood. Have a dinner with friends over a video chat platform and watch the same movie at the same time with a sync-watching app. Attend a live religious service online. Maintaining a structure to your day and some semblance of normalcy will help reduce anxiety.

9. Be Kind to Yourself and Others and Have Faith: It's normal to feel anxious and worried during a national crisis. Reaching out to relatives and friends who are isolated or in need will boost their spirits and yours. If you are in good financial standing, be grateful and continue to pay others for the services they cannot provide. Venmo or mail checks to your housekeeper, hairdresser, or others who are unable to work. If you are unemployed or your business is suffering, your new job is to weather this storm as best as you can until it passes. It always passes. Have faith that it will, despite not having all the answers. Having faith or imagining the worst is a choice. Which one will you choose?

10. Seek Out Professional Help: You don't need to do this alone. If you are experiencing an escalation of anxiety, talk to a professional who can help you through this difficult time. Almost all therapists are using telehealth, so you are not limited to professionals in your area. Medication for anxiety, depression, and insomnia might also be needed and can be prescribed by a psychiatrist or your primary care physician. You [can find a therapist and psychiatrist at the Anxiety and Depression Association of America \(ADAA.org\)](https://www.adaa.org).

This list is a recipe to reduce anxiety. Review it again and put it into practice. Otherwise it's like reading a cooking recipe in bed – in the end you have produced nothing and have nothing delicious to eat. So...start cooking.

About the Author



Ken Goodman, LCSW treats anxiety and OCD in Los Angeles. He is the author of [*The Anxiety Solution Series: Your Guide to Overcoming Panic, Worry, Compulsions and Fear, A Step-by-Step Self-help Audio Program.*](#) and *Break Free from Anxiety*, a coloring, self-help book for anxiety sufferers. Ken Goodman is an ADAA board member and Clinical Fellow. [Visit his website.](#)