



Strategies to Manage Your Coronavirus Stress and Anxiety

Watching the outbreak of a **new coronavirus** unfold across the world has many on edge, as 24/7 news coverage has kept the illness at the forefront of conversations and thoughts for months now in the U.S. The new virus causes COVID-19, a respiratory illness that has shown to cause serious sickness particularly in older adults and individuals with chronic conditions. As the first cases were reported in China in December 2019 and have rapidly spread since then, information about COVID-19 continues to change. The fluid nature of the situation – and the fact that there’s not yet a vaccine for the virus – makes it difficult to process. Heightened **feelings of stress and anxiety** are normal during this type of a situation. “The thing that has people scared is that it’s an unknown,” said Dr. William Beecroft, medical director of behavioral health for Blue Care Network. “It’s not any more extraordinary than what we’ve lived through before.”

Beecroft said responding to the coronavirus as an individual takes a balanced approach. Don’t completely ignore the risks that the virus poses – especially if you are over 60 and have a chronic respiratory condition – but it’s not the apocalypse.

“Prepare if you need to,” Beecroft said. “But this isn’t a catastrophe. It’s not the end of the world.”

It’s important for individuals to prioritize taking care of their overall mental and physical health, Beecroft said.

Beecroft offered the following advice:

Empower yourself to stay well: Wash your hands frequently or use hand sanitizer when necessary, especially when out in public.

Take a walk: Exercise in any form – especially walking – can help you have clarity of thought and decreases anxiety, while maintaining your overall health.

Be mindful of what you put in your body: Eat a healthy diet and stay away from excessive alcohol and caffeine consumption. Excessive alcohol, caffeine or nicotine use are unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Stay up to date on vaccines: Make sure you are up-to date on vaccinations, including the flu vaccine and the pneumonia vaccine if your doctor recommends it.

Get plenty of sleep: Sleeping well helps your body regulate itself so your immune system can function properly.

Limit your media consumption: Stay informed on the outbreak but limit your sources of information to reliable institutions like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WebMD, the Mayo Clinic and communications from health care providers. Limit your consumption of media coverage on the outbreak to once a day or every other day. Being glued to breaking news updates on the coronavirus reinforces a sense of panic and will give you a heightened level of anxiety, Beecroft said.

“When you’re really anxious and when you’re stressed, your immune system can’t respond and that would make you more susceptible to regular illnesses and to the coronavirus,” Beecroft said.

Pay attention to how you are reacting to the news of the outbreak, especially after trying simple techniques to mitigate your stress and anxiety. If you are experiencing significant disturbed sleep, abusing substances including alcohol, if you have a loss in appetite or if you experience weight loss – up to five percent in a week – you may need to seek professional assistance to help manage your symptoms, Beecroft said.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network can help members find a mental health professional. On the back of every BCBSM and BCN insurance card is a phone number for mental health and substance use help. That number leads to a live person that will help connect members with the right in-network professional that is closest to them.

Additionally, the following resources are available:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Disaster Distress Hotline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- People with deafness or hearing loss can use their preferred relay service to call 1-800-985-5990

Beecroft offered the reminder that past public health threats like the swine flu, H1N1, Ebola and HIV were once unknown illnesses – yet now there are treatments and vaccines to help prevent them.

“We have the best scientists working on the problem not only current treatments but prevention strategies going forward,” Beecroft said. “It is important to remind ourselves that we have succeeded in fighting these illnesses in the past and they now are still dangerous but controlled.”

More from MIBluesPerspectives.com:

- [Coronavirus Outbreak: What You Need to Know](#)
- [How to Access Telehealth Care During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)
- [Blue Cross Takes Action to Help Members During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)

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