

# Helpful coronavirus (COVID-19) resources

**Optum Public Crisis Line:** Our toll-free emotional support help line at [\(866\) 342-6892](tel:8663426892) is free of charge and available to anyone, so you can share it with family and friends. Caring professionals will connect people to resources. It will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## Learn how to calm your fears and protect your health

- Read about [mindfulness techniques](#) for coping with coronavirus anxiety.
- [Watch a video](#) to learn about COVID-19, how to protect yourself, and where to get ongoing updates.
- **Watch a webinar: Coping with Traumatic Events**  
Traumatic events can range from acts of terrorism, war, natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19. Whatever form they take, when trauma hits close to home, it can be hard to process. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. This program helps identify and normalize reactions to traumatic events. Participants will explore the broad emotional impact and look at healthy ways to cope.

Participants will:

- Define what a “critical incident” is
  - Discuss expected expressions of grief and emotional toll
  - Identify appropriate means of support and how to avoid stressors
  - Learn effective stress-reduction techniques
  - Examine strategies for helping children cope
  - Determine when to seek professional support
  - Explore the range of normal responses to critical incidents, such as the outbreak of Coronavirus
- **Watch a webinar: Get the Best of Stress**  
In this training, participants will get an overview of stress basics as well as practical suggestions for coping with stressful situations, like the Coronavirus outbreak. The concept of stress hardiness is also introduced as a focus for healthy stress management. In addition, attendees will get tools to help them dial down stress and better understand personal and organizational aspects of stress.

Participants will:

- Learn ways to respond to stress differently
  - Apply several stress management techniques
  - Identify common sources of stress, such as seeing repeated images or hearing reports about the COVID-19 outbreak in the media, and learn our reactions to it
- [Visit the CDC](#) for more information and up-to-date resources.



# Mindfulness techniques for managing coronavirus anxiety at home and work

## What is coronavirus?

Of all the newsworthy events that have happened so far in the new year, there's one word that has stayed consistently in the media and is now at the centre of a lot of daily coverage – coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. While coronaviruses are actually a large family of viruses that can range from the common cold to more severe diseases, this one in particular has been getting a lot of attention because it's a novel virus, meaning that it's a new strain of the coronavirus family.

The constant alerts and announcements about coronavirus can be anxiety-inducing and leave you with a lot of questions – should I really be scared of the virus? What should I do to prepare? How will this affect my business? Whether you're preparing for yourself and your family or you're an employer wondering how to prepare your teams, there are several approaches you can take to cope.

Mindfulness can help you navigate the overwhelming amount of information about the current coronavirus situation: get familiar with the facts, understand how the brain works in these types of situations, know how you can calmly and rationally prepare, and bring an awareness to how you're processing the information to help guide intentional action.

## Should we be afraid of coronavirus?

Ever since the spread of coronavirus was first reported from Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019, we have watched the virus cross the borders of multiple countries. With the number of infected countries continuing to climb, the World Health Organization (WHO) recently raised its risk assessment of the novel coronavirus strain to "very high", causing many to start feeling amplified anxiety over the virus.

From what we know so far, the most common symptoms of coronavirus are fever, cough and shortness of breath. It's important to note that these can also be symptoms of the flu or the common cold, and if you haven't been around anyone who's travelled to Asia, Iran or Italy or who has already tested positive for coronavirus, then your chances of having the virus are very small. But to help keep your mind at ease if symptoms do begin to emerge in your home or work environments, **knowing when to call the doctor** and go in for clinical testing can be beneficial.

The coronavirus is also occurring alongside **a very busy flu season**; there are ways to prepare yourself and your workplace so that everyone can stay calm and rational during this time of uncertainty.

## How your brain views the coronavirus

As helpful as your brain's "fight or flight" response can be to protect you from potentially dangerous situations, it can also stir up anxious thoughts during events such as the global spread of the coronavirus.

So, why is your brain fixating on the dangers of the coronavirus when the regular flu season has affected so many more people? The flu is familiar; we all learn about it early on in life so we know what it is and how to handle it as adults. New viruses like COVID-19 can be a little scarier than an existing virus, and all of that uncertainty can make it easy for your brain to latch onto anxious thoughts and spiral.

While it's good to have awareness of what's going on, taking a moment to be present with your anxious thoughts and feelings can help you discover whether your thoughts are fact-based or whether you are experiencing a stress response to the uncertainty of the situation.

Understanding the difference between the two can help you maintain your inner peace as more information is gathered.

### **Moderate your media coverage of the virus**

Most of us have at least one screen in front of us for most of the day, and it's easy to fall into one of two camps – people who watch and read every media source available about the coronavirus, and people who choose to avoid the topic altogether to focus on “happier” things. Both responses are valid when there is a new virus spreading, but there is also a way to mindfully merge both camps into a calmer middle ground.

Getting information and updates about the coronavirus is important, but tuning into sensationalised media coverage that's meant to induce anxiety and panic can be counterproductive to maintaining your personal or professional environments. Setting personal boundaries and limiting your media updates to fact-based, frequently updated government websites can help you stay informed without triggering anxiety or worry. These resources include:

- **The WHO**
- **The CDC**

### **Tips for making a plan**

An important component of mindfulness is accepting things as they are but choosing how to react to them, and that same principle can be applied to the current situation. While you cannot change that the coronavirus has spread, you can choose how you want to react to it, and making a plan at home and work can help you react with confidence and rationality.

#### **Planning at home**

- Stock up on medications and food to limit time spent in public spaces.
- Use the latest government recommendations if family members become symptomatic.
- Having open, safe discussions where your feelings and the feelings of your family are validated and addressed can also help to maintain an environment of peaceful calm.



#### **Planning for the workplace**

- Having plans in place for working remotely and encouraging use of available sick days can help companies take care of their teams.
- Employers should also create safe spaces for open, non-judgemental conversation about COVID-19 to help employee wellness.
- If you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose and use a napkin as opposed to your hand.
- Use alcohol wipes to sanitise your workspace, phone and any other technology that you touch.
- Avoid touching your face with your hands.

#### **Remain calm (and aware)**

It's difficult to turn a blind eye to the urgent news stories and panicked responses to the coronavirus across the globe, but approaching the situation mindfully can help you, your family and your workplace cope and plan calmly and rationally. Focus your attention inward to your thoughts and feelings about the situation and validate that your mind will want to “go down the rabbit hole” with anxious thoughts since this is a new viral strain.

But rather than fearing the coronavirus, understanding the symptoms, assessing whether anyone you are in contact with is symptomatic, and making a plan at both work and home are all ways to confidently prepare. The CDC, the WHO and other reputable government websites that don't sensationalise the topic are great sources to follow for real, unsensationalised facts about the current status of the coronavirus, and those sites will also have the most up-to-date instructions for the best ways to keep yourself and everyone around you safe during this unique flu and illness season.

Sources:

World Health Organization, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Written by Becky Greiner. 

This programme should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 if you are in the United States or the local emergency services phone number if you are outside the United States, or go to the nearest accident & emergency department. This programme is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This programme and all its components, in particular services to family members below the age of 16, may not be available in all locations and is subject to change without prior notice. Experience and/or educational levels of Employee Assistance Programme resources may vary based on contract requirements or country regulatory requirements. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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