**Managing anxiety in the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic**

Version 2, 18 March 2020 Chronic Pain Service

**This is advice is for anyone who is feeling heightened levels of stress and anxiety esponse to especially related to the situation caused by Coronavirus (Covid-19).**

If you are having trouble dealing with worries about the coronavirus you are not alone.

Lots of people will have worries about this, which is understandable, as is feeling worried or on edge in this abnormal situation. The majority of people find these feelings come and go, and don’t affect us every minute of every day.

Self-isolation can still be anxiety provoking for some; it is an unusual thing to do. In this unusual situation we may find that stress, boredom and worries about health, family or work can feel worse. If you have had previous mental health or psychological difficulties then it is important to know that your normal worries may return or feel worse for a period of time. Isolation can also cause practical day-to-day difficulties which can cause feelings of frustration or lead you to feel lower in mood.

**What you’re feeling is normal**

* It is **normal to be feeling stressed, anxious and scared** right now. Most of us haven’t experienced anything like this before. That’s true for most people, all over the world.
* One of the scariest things is **uncertainty**, especially as everything unfolds so fast.Human beings hate uncertainty, and want guaranteed answers. Because at present there aren’t any, our anxiety is likely to be high! Again, this is the most normal thing in the world right now.
* Anxiety brings with it lots of **different physical feelings**. This can include a racing heart, chest pain or palpitations, sweatiness and a shortness of breath. Again, all of these are very normal.
* In response to those feelings, our minds might say: “What if it’s coronavirus?” That’s normal too. The NHS Scotland website, **www.nhsinform.scot**, is very good on what the actual coronavirus symptoms are.

**What we can all do (and what we can’t)**

* No matter how much we want it, we *can’t* get certainty right now. So, **allow yourself to feel what you’re feeling**. It’s OK not to feel OK.
* Different people will feel different things at different times, and that’s OK too.
* It’s tempting to spend a lot of time poring over the news or looking online – especially at social media – in the hope this will help. However, this often makes us feel worse, especially because there’s such an endless stream of information – and arguments! So, don’t watch the news channel constantly. If **you’re going online or checking the news to look for updates then try to do it only once or twice a day, at specific times**.
* Social media is helpful in keeping us connected with people, but is rife with misinformation. As a rule of thumb, get your information from **trusted sources** such as:

**www.nhsinform.scot**

**www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk**

**https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public**

* We still have to make **judgement calls** about our health, if you’re worried about what to do, please seek advice from the best placed sources such as **NHS 111** (or see above and at the bottom of this leaflet)
* We *can’t* switch off anxious thoughts and feelings. But we *can* learn ways of coping with them. We’ve put together some ideas below.

**How you can help your own mental health**

* The key thing is to **be kind to yourself**.
* **Keep to a routine.** Sleep, nourishing yourself as best as you can, daily structure all effect our sense of wellbeing. Talk to others about how you are feeling. Be open and honest. Others are probably feeling the way you are too. And, most of all, don’t blame yourself or beat yourself up if you feel you’re not coping as well as you’d like.
* **Take time to do the things you enjoy**. Watch, read, listen. Play games. Look after yourself. Do things you’ve not had time to do, complete a project that you haven’t had time to do.
* **Vary what you do.** Spend shorter periods of time doing different things as this will help alleviate boredom.
* **Try to notice the little things that lift your mood.** This can be anything from appreciating the comfort in a cup of tea, looking at the spring flowers, or sending a message to a friend. Anything that gives us a little bit of a positive boost.
* **Stay in touch with people you like and trust** if you can. If you’re socially distancing or you’re having to self-isolate, why not keep in touch by phone, message or video call? Be proactive in making contact; both of you will appreciate the contact!
* Be sensible and **follow advice** on how much contact to have with others.
* **Be kind to others, too**. Doing this makes us feel good about ourselves as well!
* There are also some recordings of helpful exercises at the website **stresscontrolaudio.com**. Mobile phone and tablet Apps like **Self-help for Anxiety Management, Calm, Headspace, Mindshift** have free content to help with relaxation and stress reduction.
* **If you drink alcohol, please try to keep consumption within the recommended limits.** Excessive alcohol (or drug) use is never a good long-term solution.

**Finally …**

* If you are currently seeing an NHS Lanarkshire mental health professional, the team will keep you updated about any changes to appointments if these arise.
* You may find it helpful to access Pain Association Scotland on www.painassociationscotland.co.uk
* Remember that GPs and other NHS staff are likely to be extremely busy right now, and you might find it more difficult to get hold of them. **www.nhsinform.scot** is the go-to website for advice. It also has lots more self-help tips about managing anxiety and low mood.
* You will find a wide range of information for mental health and wellbeing at eLament (eLanarkshire Mental Health Resources) visit: [**www.lanarkshirementalhealth.org.uk**](http://www.lanarkshirementalhealth.org.uk)
* Should you need help urgently or if your mental health problems persist please contact your GP or out-of-hours NHS24 on 111. The following agencies may also help: **Breathing Space – 0800 83 85 87** (evenings and weekends) [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)or **Samaritans – 01698 429411 or 116 123** (24hrs) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org).
* If you do want to find out some information, get accurate information from a reliable source such as NHS 24 or the online 111 service at **www.111.nhs.uk.** If you have general worries about coronavirus but are not unwell you can also call the Coronavirus helpline on **0800 0282816** for support.