

# Managing Your Mental Health and Staying Well during the COVID-19 Outbreak



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**This document was developed by Mind HK. The translation of it was supported by UNHCR. To access these tips in other languages, please visit [Mind HK's website on COVID-19 mental health tips](#).**

The recent COVID-19 outbreak has caused a lot of worry and anxiety for Hong Kong people, particularly given the uncertainty about the virus. Mind HK, a local mental health charity, wants everyone to consider not only their physical health, but also their mental health, during this challenging time, as the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health, the healthier and better equipped we'll be. Below are some tips on how to make mental health a priority.

## How to understand and manage anxiety

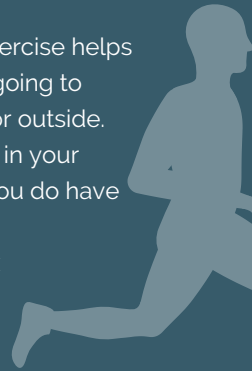
**Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid; it is a natural and valid human response when we perceive that we are in danger.** Our thoughts are interlinked with how we feel emotionally and physically in our bodies. If we experience "catastrophic" and anxious thoughts (e.g. "I won't be able to protect my family from the virus"), this is likely going to make us feel distressed and anxious, which will affect how we feel in our bodies (e.g. by causing sleeping difficulties, poor appetite, difficulty concentrating and low energy), making us more vulnerable towards becoming physically unwell and possibly more susceptible to contracting flu-like symptoms.

## Signs that may indicate you are struggling with anxiety:

- Noticing your mind being preoccupied by current events
- Becoming more sensitive or reactive to news about the situation
- Having trouble with focus, concentration, memory or decision making
- Feeling more irritable, stressed, exhausted
- Shallow breathing, faster heartbeat, headaches
- Having trouble falling asleep or feeling restless
- Constantly checking social media or news sources for information

# Ways to maintain your well-being:

- Try to **manage overwhelming feelings of anxiety** by recognizing and acknowledging your emotions regularly, rather than avoiding them
- **Maintain a healthy routine** and look after your physical health (get enough sleep, eat healthy).
- **Connect with others.** Talk to someone you trust and spend time connecting with friends or family who make you happy. Avoid talking only about the virus and the current situation.
- **Get outside or go for a walk** in a non crowded area
- **Keep active**
  - Try to move your body each day, even if you are indoors, as exercise helps to elevate your mood and lower stress. If you do not feel safe going to your gym or studio, look into continuing your routine at home or outside.
- **Learn to manage feelings of uncertainty.** Try to separate what is in your control and what is out of your control. Attend to the things that you do have control over.
- Try some **breathing and mindfulness exercises** to help you relax
- Incorporate an activity from each of the "Five ways to well-being":  
**Give, Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning**



## Switch off from social media

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 virus, there has been a fair amount of speculation and fear mongering in the media. The spread of sensationalised, unverified information about the virus is causing unnecessary stress, leading to a detrimental impact on people's mental health. If you are feeling overwhelmed, here are some ways you can take a break and switch off from social media and the news:

- **Avoid excessively checking social media and the news.** Check one reliable source once a day if you want to stay up to date, but try not to exceed this.
- **Identify reliable sources of information** rather than relying on social media or news outlets
- **Engage yourself in other activities** such as work, connecting with friends/family or hobbies
- **Try moving main social media and news apps** away from the home screen of your phone or disabling them for a while
- **Turn off notifications** from apps

It's also important to remember that often, the epidemic of anxiety can increase more rapidly than the epidemic of the illness itself.

# Coping with isolation and loneliness

As social beings, most of us feel the need for social interaction. Given many are staying indoors, working from home, and avoiding going out, many are facing loneliness and isolation.

**Loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for social interaction is not fulfilled.** Being in isolation and not connecting with others can contribute to mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression; it is therefore important to learn to recognize these feelings early.

## Here are some tips on how to overcome loneliness:

- Try **alternative ways of making contact with others**, e.g. texting or video call.
- **Meet new people online**
- **Go outside for a walk** (when its less crowded). Even saying hello to a neighbor can make you feel a little less lonely.
- **Learn to spend time alone**
  - Spending time alone can be rewarding. Being on your own gives you a chance to **do something that you enjoy or are interested in**, e.g. cooking.
  - Having time to think and reflect on things when you're on your own can be a **positive experience**. Techniques like yoga, meditation, or keeping a journal can help you to relax.
- If you have pets at home, **spending some quality time with your pets** may help reduce feelings of loneliness.



This article is informative only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you are experiencing high levels of distress, **remember that you do not have to face it alone**, and that help is available. **For emergency support, please contact your local emergency services.**

### For emergency support in HK please contact:

Emergency hotline: **999**

The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multi-lingual):

**(852) 2896 0000**

Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only):

**(852) 2389 2222**

Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only):

**(852) 2382 0000**

### Reliable sources for information on COVID-19:

WHO: [who.int/](https://www.who.int/)

For more crisis support services in HK: [mind.org.hk/find-help-now](https://www.mind.org.hk/find-help-now)

For more non-urgent support services in HK:

[mind.org.hk/community-directory/](https://www.mind.org.hk/community-directory/)



Mind HK ([www.mind.org.hk](http://www.mind.org.hk)) is a registered section 88 charity (91/16471) committed to improving awareness and understanding of mental health in Hong Kong.

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