

# MANAGING ANXIETY AND STRESS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

## HOW TO CARE FOR OURSELVES:

- SYMPTOMS LIST
- PRACTICES FOR THE MIND & BODY
- ACTION STEPS
- SELF-CARE PLAN



# MANAGING ANXIETY & STRESS DURING COVID-19



This is a moment when people’s anxiety can be greatly increased—and that makes sense given all that is coming at us and happening around us. We know that our health, including our mental health, is inherently political. We offer these resources as part of the Center's Politicized Healing framework that understands we get to transformative justice when we heal from and dismantle systems of harm while creating new systems of care. Please check out our short workbook, [Trauma-Informed Practices During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#), for support in thinking about how to develop a routine for yourself that can help reduce anxiety and increase resilience.

If you are experiencing anxiety, this short workbook provides some tools that you may find helpful.

Some emotional symptoms of anxiety include:

- feelings of apprehension or dread
- feeling tense and jumpy
- restlessness or irritability
- anticipating the worst
- increased fears about the future that are overwhelming

Some physical symptoms of anxiety include:

- pounding or racing heart
- shortness of breath
- upset stomach
- frequent urination or diarrhea
- sweating, tremors and twitches
- headaches, fatigue
- difficulty sleeping

The following pages include activities that can help you manage your anxiety. We have divided them into three categories: Mind, Body, and Action.

## REMINDER



*Allow yourself healthy breaks from news and/or social media to allow time to breathe and re-ground as needed.*



# Practices for the MIND



## PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

**Practice Mindfulness.** This can help bring attention back to the present moment and move the mind away from anxiety-producing thoughts. Developing your mindfulness practice doesn't have to be complicated—you can start right where you are. What are you grateful for today? Notice what comes up, and write it down if you'd like.

## USE AFFIRMATIONS



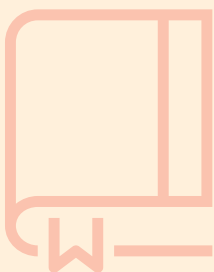
**Use Affirmations.** Affirmations are positive statements to repeat to yourself to move away from negative thought patterns or stories you may be telling yourself. Here is just one example to try: "...having compassion for myself in this moment is the most important resource I can access. I give myself copious amounts of it." (Chani Nicholas)

## CREATE A "PARKING LOT" LIST



**Create a "parking lot" list.** If worries feel like they are taking up all of your time try sitting down, at a scheduled time to write out your concerns and try to identify one thing you can do to help address each concern. If it helps you can come back at a set time each day and update your list. Maybe you are able to take a worry off (My job is fine!) and maybe you need to add one (Car is acting up again). The list can be a place where you "park" your worries - when they try to interrupt at other points in the day you can say, "I will deal with you later" at List Time or Worry Time.

## JOURNAL



**Journal.** Write down your thoughts in a journal and try to find patterns. Bringing awareness to times when your anxiety has been elevated can offer opportunity to understand triggers and create plans to address them. Notice how your body responds to anxiety and write down how it has appeared. Our body can communicate to us when we are anxious. If you are at the grocery store and your chest tightens, stop and look around: notice and observe what you are feeling. This is an act of love that may not have been provided to you in the past. The space and attention to stop and notice when you feel upset allows you to be your own best first responder. A journal of triggers is like a love letter to your body, heart and soul - I see you, I hear you, I am here for you. It is tough work and CTJC is here for you while you do it.

# Practices for the BODY

**Breathing Exercises** Breathing exercises have all sorts of physical benefits. Breathing deeply, for example, sends a message to your brain that you're OK—helping your mind and body relax. One breathing exercise to try is the 4-7-8 technique. Breathe in for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7, and breathe out for a count of 8.

**Consume Consciously** Watch what you are eating and drinking. Some foods and drinks can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety. Research has proven that eating foods such as whole grains, leafy green vegetables, and low-fat dairy products can help reduce anxiety. In contrast, nicotine, caffeine and other stimulant drugs can trigger our adrenal glands to release adrenaline, which is a primary stress chemical. It is best to avoid or limit these, as well as other highly processed foods. Remember that every body is different—you'll know best what foods do and don't work for you.

**Move Your Body** In addition to being overall good for our physical health, exercise helps to burn up stress chemicals and promote relaxation. Try to build in opportunities for regular exercise three to four times a week. These can be 5 minutes or longer, but try to pick things you enjoy.

**Get Enough Sleep** Getting solid sleep is beneficial to our mental and physical health, but we know it can be challenging in times of high stress. Try to develop a nighttime routine that helps set you up for at least some solid rest. Some experts recommend avoiding your phone screen before bed and giving yourself a "bedtime do over" if you can't fall asleep. One technique to try before sleep is a mindful body scan. [Click here for a few versions](#) you can listen to or read via transcript.

**Muscle relaxation** exercises can be a helpful way to manage anxiety. One progressive muscle relaxation exercise suggests choosing a muscle group (like your thighs), intentionally tightening the muscles for a few seconds, and then letting them go. Continue with different muscle groups until you've worked your way through your whole body.

BREATHING  
EXERCISES

CONSUME  
CONSCIOUSLY

MOVE YOUR  
BODY

GET ENOUGH  
SLEEP

MUSCLE  
RELAXATION

# Action STEPS



Reach out to people in your community for support, or try to find an online support group you can join.



Identify opportunities to become involved in your community. So many people are looking for support and assistance, and sometimes being part of a larger collective can help us get out of our own negative spirals. Check out these resources to find mutual aid or other volunteer opportunities near you.

If you are feeling unable to manage, try reaching out to your doctor if you have one to discuss the short-term possibility of medication to assist with anxiety.



At CTJC, we do not assume that calling 911 is a safe option, and we are working every day to build something better. For now, here are a few options **if you feel that your safety is at immediate risk:**

- Call your doctor (if you have one)
- Call or text a crisis hotline (note: they may or may not call 911)

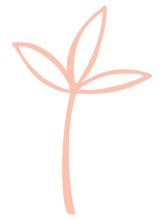
**Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance**  
**1.800.273.TALK (8255) | 24/7**

**Crisis Text Line (24/7)**  
**Text HOME to 741741 to reach a Crisis Counselor**

If you feel you need to call 911, ask for a non-police presence. For example: "My name is X. I am having a mental health crisis and need a fire truck or an ambulance."



# MY CARE PLAN



*In moments when emotions are heightened, it can be challenging to think clearly.*

*Develop a care plan for yourself when you are feeling lower levels of stress like in the morning before looking at the news, after a solo dance party, or after a good meal or hot shower.*

*Complete this section and refer back to it when experiencing feelings of overwhelm to review your plan to care for yourself.*

## 1. LIST PEOPLE YOU CAN CALL WHEN YOU ARE FEELING ANXIOUS, OR OVERWHELMED:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

*It's okay if you only have one name here. That's the case for many of us. If none of these people are available, or your circle of support is limited at this time, you can call one of the crisis numbers on the previous page.*

*If you are not in an emergency situation, you can call **CTJC's Drop-In Line for support Mondays through Fridays from 9AM to 5PM: 773.242.9289.***



# MY CARE PLAN



## 2. LIST ACTIVITIES THAT HAVE HELPED TO SETTLE AND BRING CALM TO YOUR SYSTEM WHEN YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN OVERWHELMED.

*Some examples might include: coloring, drinking a hot cup of tea, dancing, a hot shower, standing in the sun, going for a run.*

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## 3. WHAT IS THE KIND OF SUPPORT YOU WOULD FIND MOST HELPFUL IN MOMENTS OF HIGH STRESS OR EMOTION?

*Share these answers with you support crew you listed on the first question.*

*Some examples might include:*

- someone to be with you virtually or phone (no advice giving or problem solving);
- someone to help you develop a plan or routine for how to get your immediate needs met;
- someone to distract you with other things; or
- someone to help contact emergency services and ensure your safety.

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## Sites sourced:

- [adaa.org](http://adaa.org)
- [betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- [nami.org](http://nami.org)



The Chicago Torture Justice Center seeks to address the traumas of police violence and institutionalized racism through access to healing and wellness services, trauma-informed resources, and community connection. The Center is a part of and supports a movement to end all forms of police violence.

[ChicagoTortureJustice.org](http://ChicagoTortureJustice.org)

