

## **Self-care Guide for Anxiety**

**In the current context, anxiety is a normal reaction  
to an abnormal situation.**

**How to equip yourself to better cope with it?**

## Contents

1.1	<a href="#">Read</a>	4
1.2	<a href="#">Bring out your artistic side</a>	4
1.3	<a href="#">Take time to connect with your friends / family by phone</a>	4
1.4	<a href="#">Listening to music</a>	5
1.5	<a href="#">Listening to your favorite shows / movies</a>	5
1.6	<a href="#">Discover a new hobby</a>	5
1.7	<a href="#">Try new recipes</a>	5
1.8	<a href="#">Exercise</a>	5
1.9	<a href="#">Doing the things we always put off</a>	5
1.10	<a href="#">Playing board games</a>	6
1.11	<a href="#">Self-care for a day at home</a>	6
1.12	<a href="#">Doing relaxation exercises</a>	6
	<a href="#">Tip 2 : Check with official sources</a>	8
	<a href="#">Tip 3 : Avoid media overexposure</a>	8
	<a href="#">Tip 4 : Keep you healthy lifestyle habits</a>	9
4.1	<a href="#">Food</a>	9
4.1.1	<a href="#">Some suggestions for promoting nutrition</a>	9
4.2	<a href="#">Sleep</a>	9
4.2.1	<a href="#">Some suggestions to promote sleep</a>	9
4.3	<a href="#">Physical activity</a>	10
4.3.1	<a href="#">Some ideas for including daily physical activity</a>	10
4.4	<a href="#">Alcohol and drug use</a>	10
	<a href="#">Tip 5 : Maintain a routine, despite the isolation instructions</a>	10
	<a href="#">Tip 6 : Show self-compassion and indulgence towards yourself and others</a>	11
	<a href="#">Tip 7 : Watch entertaining movies or TV series</a>	11
	<a href="#">Tip 8 : Do things you never have time to do</a>	11
	<a href="#">Tip 9 : Challenge yourself to find good news or something positive in the day</a>	11
	<a href="#">Connection between thought, emotions and behavior</a>	11
	<a href="#">When does it become necessary to seek help?</a>	13
1.12.1	<a href="#">On the physical plane</a>	14

<a href="#">1.12.2</a>	<a href="#">Psychological and emotional</a> .....	14
<a href="#">1.12.3</a>	<a href="#">Behaviorally</a> .....	14
	<a href="#">Other resources available</a> .....	14

## Normal emotions

In a situation like this, it is normal to feel:

- Fear, stress and anxiety: When faced with a threat, fear allows humans to take action to defend themselves. However, when the anxiety becomes too strong, these actions are no longer effective. The unpredictability, the novelty of the situation and the feeling of loss of control inevitably cause significant stress.
- Sadness, depression and loneliness: By being isolated, limited in activities and away from friends, colleagues and loved ones, everyday life can become heavier.
- Frustration, anger and irritability: Isolation is frustrating, especially since many are confined to the house with their children and deprived of activities and social contacts.

Some tips to better manage the anxiety associated with the current situation

**Tip 1:** Get into action. Even if it is recommended to stay at home for the next few weeks, there are a lot of things you can explore or invest ...

### 1.1 Read

Whether it is re-reading a book you like, discovering a new book or reading the book that has been hanging around for a long time due to lack of time, reading is an activity that takes us on a journey, without germs! With e-books, audio versions (podcast) or online orders, you don't have to leave the house!

### 1.2 Bring out your artistic side

Lots of possibilities depending on preferences and doesn't necessarily need a lot of equipment! In the choices, there is painting, drawing, scrapbooking, playing music, dancing! It also helps a lot to relax and express emotions in a positive way.

### 1.3 Take time to connect with your friends / your family by phone

It is not because we have to stay at home more that we cannot socialize! It's important to stay in touch with people, it's positive for our mental health. Whether by phone, Skype or other, it's time to call the people you love and make those calls that we always put off. It does us and others good!

## **1.4 Listening to music**

Music accompanies us in all aspects of our lives. It's something for everyone! It's time to listen to the songs we love, to discover new artists. Singing also allows us to exteriorize our emotions and have a better mood!

## **1.5 Listening to our favorite shows / movies**

It's time to listen or re-listen to our favorite series and movies! With popcorn, hot chocolate and a blanket, we can have a good time! On the other hand, opt for light and funny content, which does not increase anxiety.

## **1.6 Discover a new hobby**

It is never too late to discover something new. It's time to try something that has been tempting you for a long time, or something new! Whether it's knitting, photography, indoor gardening, learning a new language or an instrument, anything is possible! In addition, many courses are offered for free on the net today.

## **1.7 Try new recipes**

It's time to cook differently, make the ones you usually find too long and stock up on small dishes! Are you missing ingredients and want to avoid the grocery store? Two solutions are available to you. You can be creative and adapt your recipes, otherwise the Volunteer Center is available for your groceries and can deliver them to your home (if you are aged 70 or over and you present special health conditions ) [\[1\]](#). It is strongly recommended to plan your menu for the week, in order to limit as much as possible stopping at the grocery store.

## **1.8 Exercise**

One very important thing to maintain good health is to have good lifestyle habits. Being active is a good way to improve your physical and psychological well-being! No need to sign up for classes, walking outside or using training or yoga videos on the Internet are good ways to remain active.

## **1.9 Doing the things we always put off**

Whether it's doing our spring cleaning, sorting through old photos or redecorating the house (sometimes, just cleaning up your decor and throwing away things you don't like), it feels good and can take a load off your shoulders. Be careful not to think too big and get exhausted, the goal is to take care of yourself!

## **1.10 Playing board games**

Whether it's a card game, a board game or on the Internet, the goal is to change our thoughts and have fun. There are many games out there, to play alone or in pairs, and even online!

## **1.11 Self-care for a day at home**

Taking care of yourself is important. Self-care it is about doing an activity for us, which makes us feel good. This may be to take a hot bath, make a facial mask (there are plenty of recipes with ingredients that we already have at home available online), do your nails, use essential oils, drink herbal teas... The goal is to allow yourself time to relax.

## **1.12 Doing relaxation exercises**

It's a good time to try things to calm down, especially if you tend to be anxious. Be careful, ideally do not try it for the first time when you are very stressed, it may not work as well. You have to practice when you are less tense and when you master it well, try it in situations of greater stress. To do this, we offer the following two techniques:

### **N ° 1. Diaphragmatic breathing**

This type of slow and deep breathing brings better oxygenation of the blood and a state of general well-being which then allows us to think better. It improves the digestive system and decreases respiratory, cardiac rhythms as well as blood pressure. It also decreases the possibility of hyperventilation often associated with anxiety.

#### **Method:**

- 1 Sit comfortably on a chair in a quiet place. Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest, continuing to breathe normally.
- 2 Breathe slowly through your nose (you can also breathe through your mouth if you prefer).
- 3 When inhaling, you may find that your chest swells, not your belly. Ideally, it should be the reverse. Now try to breathe using your diaphragm, that is, by breathing through your stomach. Your belly should swell when you breathe in, as if you wanted to push your hand.
- 4 Inflate your abdomen (not your chest). You can do this by lowering the diaphragm. Once the abdomen is stretched, your inspiration will come.

- 5 Next inflate the chest. Inhale slowly and deeply. It may be possible to experience discomfort at first, but this type of breathing is natural, and the body will adjust to it.
- 6 When exhaling, the diaphragm rises towards the chest in order to empty the lungs of the air therein and the abdomen widens. The word "relax " can be pronounced when exhaling. Exhale at least as long as you breathe, to promote a state of relaxation.
- 7 Relax the muscles of the face, shoulders and abdomen.

Do not hesitate to repeat the exercise every day, for 5 to 10 minutes. Also, the more you use the technique, the more you will be able to slow down the rate of your breathing.

## **N ° 2. Jacobson relaxation technique**

Relaxation techniques can be used to manage or even prevent stress in a given situation.

### **Method:**

- 1 Sit comfortably in a chair or lie down in a reclining position. Become aware of the points where your body comes in contact with the surface where you are resting, by mentally listing them.
- 2 Then start to "work" your muscles to contract them, then relax them:
- 3 Tighten your fists for a couple of seconds, then relax the hands; retighten the fists; feel the tension; then loosen the fists, release your fingers. Repeat this 4 or 5 times, trying each time to relax the muscles in your hand more and more. During each relaxation, repeat to yourself constantly how you are relaxed and rested while breathing deeply, but quietly.
- 4 Then flex the arm on the forearm and press hard for a few seconds; perceive the tension in your biceps, then let your arms fall, paying attention to the disappearance of the muscle contraction. Repeat slowly 4 or 5 times, trying to relax more each time you relax.
- 5 Then harden the upper limb up to the shoulder for a few seconds, then release it. Repeat 4 or 5 times.
- 6 Contract the forehead for a few seconds, feel the tensions at the forehead, then release. Feel it relax. Contract it again and release. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times.

- 7 Firmly close your eyelids for a few seconds, sense the tension, then release. Contract again, then release again. Feel the relaxation. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times while trying to relax more and more.
- 8 Clench your lips by pressing against each other for a few seconds, then release. Feel the tensions fly away. Tighten again, then release. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times, trying to relax more and more.
- 9 Contract the muscles of your neck for a few seconds, perceive the tensions; then release. Feel the relaxation. Contract again at; then release a little more. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times while trying to relax more and more.
- 10 Contract the abdominal muscles for a few seconds, then relax. Feel the tensions dissipate. Contract them again, then release. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times while trying to relax more and more.
- 11 Contract the buttock muscles for a few seconds, then relax. Feel the tensions dissipate. Contract again, then release. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times while trying to relax more and more.
- 12 Contract the thigh muscles for a few seconds, sense the tension, then relax. Feel the tensions dissipate. Contract again, then release. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times while trying to relax more and more.
- 13 Contract your feet, twitch your toes for a few seconds, feel the tension, the discomfort, and then relax. Feel the tensions dissipate. Contract again, then release. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times while trying to relax more and more.
- 14 Rest for a short time, open and close your eyes slowly, a few times, before opening them for good. After a few seconds of transition, you can resume your activities.

Also, you have access to a multitude of other techniques (and health advice) on the website *passportsante.net* (*in French only*) that we recommend. Relaxation techniques and guided meditations are available by clicking on the "podcast broadcasting" tab and you can download them for free.

**And above all, do not forget that hope is not canceled...**

**Tip 2 : Obtain information from official sources .** For example, press briefings by the Government of Quebec (every day, at 2 p.m. local time), press briefings by the mayor of the Islands (on CFIM). Rely on facts rather than rumors, in order to put the situation into perspective and not to unnecessarily increase anxiety.

**Tip 3 : Avoid media overexposure.** Including social media networks and continuous news, because the brain gets more worried with overexposure; limit the time listening



to and reading news (maximum once a day, on official networks); shutoff devices after listening to the broadcast. Diversify your topics of conversation, don't limit yourself to the current situation.

**Tip 4 : Keep your healthy lifestyle habits.** Eat healthy, be active, get outdoors, get enough sleep. Lifestyle is one of the areas where you have great power to act. They can play a major role in maintaining balance and good mental health.

## 4.1 Food

- It is a way of taking care of yourself: "a healthy mind in a healthy body " !
- It is the basis of good health.
- It may " boost " your immune system and help your body better defend against certain diseases.
- It allows you to regain your energy.
- It is rewarding.

### 4.1 . 1 Some suggestions for promoting your diet

- Eat three meals a day.
- If the appetite decreases, take smaller portions, to maintain a good level of energy throughout the day.
- Reduce consumption of stimulants: coffee, tea, soft drinks with caffeine, energy drinks, chocolate, etc.
- Take the time to sit down to eat and include the concept of pleasure.
- Use the resources available for healthy eating (Canada's Food Guide, healthy recipe books, etc.)
- Allow yourself periods of indulgence (treats).

## 4.2 Sleep

- Insomnia and sleep problems often accompany anxiety. Also, lack of sleep can increase anxiety, the feeling of heaviness in the face of daily tasks, irritability, difficulty concentrating and fatigue.

### 4.2.1 Some suggestions to help promote sleep

- Exercise during the day rather than in the evening.
- Reduce the consumption of alcohol, caffeine and nicotine.
- Reserve the bed for sleep and sexual activities.
- Go to bed only when you are drowsy.
- If sleep does not happen, get out of bed after about 15 minutes, change rooms, and do something that can help you sleep (for example, reading, writing) while waiting to get sleepy again.
- Do not sleep too much, even if you are very tired.
- Force yourself to get up in the morning.
- Do not exceed 9-10 hours of sleep.

- Avoid naps after 2 p.m.
- Do not try to sleep at all costs.
- Set time slots for bedtime rather than fixed hours (for example, between 10 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.).
- Avoid screens at least one hour before bedtime.

### 4.3 Physical activity

- Reduces anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms.
- Improves physical health.
- Increases the energy level.
- Improves the quality of sleep.
- Reduces tension.
- Allows you to leave your home, to change your ideas.
- Increases self-esteem.
- Provides a feeling of well-being, a positive state of mind.

#### 4.3.1 Some ideas for including daily physical activity

- Take daily walks.
- Play with the kids.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park further from the front doors.
- Limit the time spent in front of the screens.
- Establish a routine.
- Choose activities that we like and organize our space.

### 4.4 Alcohol and drug use

Often, alcohol and drugs are used as self-medication in order to temporarily relieve discomfort, to reduce tension. However, they can trigger or increase the anxiety already present as well as more depressive symptoms, especially if used on a regular basis. Moderation is therefore recommended, especially in times when stress is higher.

**Tip 5 : Maintain a routine, despite the isolation instructions.** Here is an example of a schedule that can be used as is or modified to suit individual needs.

Hours	activity s
8h00-9h00	Get up, wash, have breakfast
9h00-10h00	Physical exercise
10: 00-11: 00	Intellectual activities: crosswords, sudoku, reading, rallying , etc.

11h00-12h00	Meal preparation
12h00-13h00	Dining and dishes
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Quiet period : relaxation techniques, napping, puzzles, listening to music, etc.
2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Creative Activity : music, drawing, testing new recipes, etc .
3.30 p.m. - 4.30 p.m.	Go get some fresh air
4.30 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.	Supper preparation and eating
6.30 p.m. - 9.30 p.m.	Activities that make us feel better: games, call our loved ones, watching movies or entertaining series, etc .
9:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.	Start the bedtime routine : bath, herbal tea, reading, etc.

**Tip 6 : Show self-compassion and indulgence towards yourself and others.**

**Tip 7 : Watch entertaining movies or TV series .** Avoid dramatic content that may increase emotions such as fear, sadness and anger. It's time to watch to Disney movies!

**Tip 8 : Do things you never have time to do .** For example, cleaning of wardrobes, filing of photos, papers and clothes, spring cleaning, etc.

**Tip 9 : Challenge yourself to find good news or something positive in the day.**

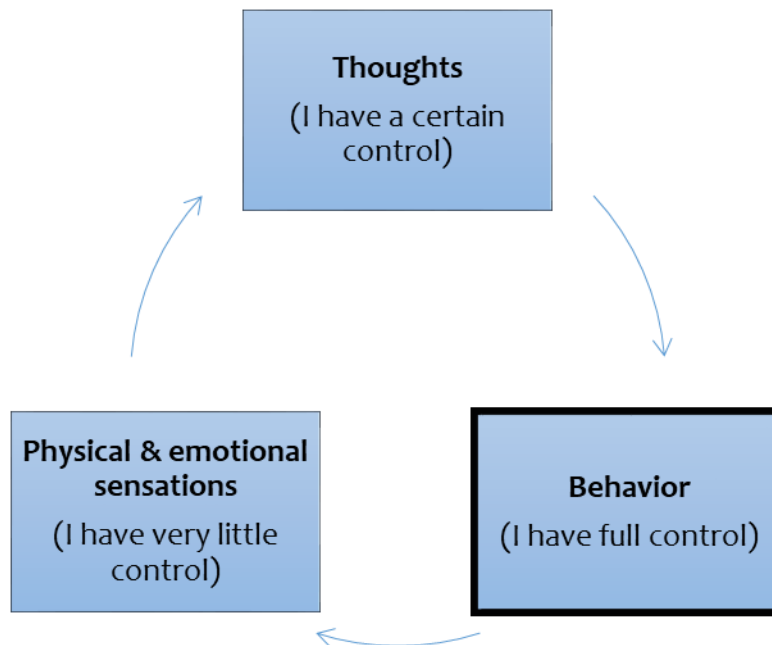
## **Connection between thought, emotions and behavior**

Fear is contagious, it spreads faster than illness. Fear is a basic emotion related to survival. It is contagious and spreads quickly from one human being to another in the same way as a virus, with the difference that no direct contact is necessary to spread it (taken from the blog of Victor-Olivier Hamel -Morasse, psychologist). For example, watching people buy toilet paper in large quantities will make you think that the supply of toilet paper may be running out, making you rush to stock up on it. This fear is currently based on no foundation.

If you feel anxiety building up, try to focus your energies and thoughts on actions you can take, over which you have control. Avoid spinning negative ideas and pessimistic scenarios in your head. Take a break and try to distract yourself.

Generally, we do not react to a situation, but to the perception that we have of it, that is to say to our thoughts in connection with the situation, to our internal speech.

### Anxiety cycle



As thoughts have a direct impact on emotions, it helps to work our inner speech to decrease anxiety. For example, if I meet a colleague and he doesn't greet me, I could tell myself that he resents me. In this case, I will probably feel bad. On the other hand, if I look for alternative thoughts, such as: he may be preoccupied or he didn't notice me, my emotion will be different. On the same note, if I see people rushing to stock up on toilet paper and I say to myself: " We will run out of toilet paper, it is inevitable ", I can experience a certain anxiety and a feeling of urgency to act, leading me to rush to pharmacies to get them as well. If my thinking is different (and supported by facts), for example: " There are toilet paper industries in Canada and the government assures that we will not be in shortage ", my anxiety level will decrease, which will have a direct impact on my behavior and in this case, I will stay at home, as recommended. To assess whether my thinking would benefit from being changed, I need to ask myself the following 3 questions:

- Do any facts support my thinking by 100 %?
- Does this thought allow me to consider both the positive and negative aspects of the situation?
- Does this thought make me feel better?

\*\*\* If the answer to any of the three questions is negative, it is strongly recommended that you find alternative thoughts.

Since it can be difficult to change our thoughts, we must also remember that regardless of our thoughts, we have full control over our behavior and may act despite anxiety.

It is normal to be worried in the face of uncertainty. However, in the current situation, even if there are many things we do not know, there are also many things that we know, which gives us some control over the situation and behavior to adopt.

We know that :

- If we respect the recommendations regarding social distancing (limit contact as much as possible, keep a distance of 1 to 2 meters between individuals when you have to leave your home, accept telework when possible, only go out for basic needs, etc.), the risk of contracting and spreading the virus decreases considerably.
- The best way to protect yourself is to adopt strict hygiene measures including frequent hand washing (at least 20 seconds per wash), avoid touching your face, sneeze into your elbow, etc .
- Public health and the governments work in concert and implement practical ways to limit the spread.
- Our behaviors related to our lifestyle have an impact on both our physical and psychological health.

## **When does it become necessary to seek help?**

In general, it is possible to overcome reactions of stress, anxiety and depression. On the other hand, it may be that after a certain time (weeks or months), the discomforts persist and worsen. The following signs may be an indicator that your condition is getting worse.

The presence of several of these signs can demonstrate that your personal resources no longer allow you to manage your daily worries. It may then be beneficial for you to seek help.

### 1.12.1 On the physical plane

- Feeling of suffocation, heart beating faster, dizziness, nausea
- Significant sleep difficulties
- Decreased appetite, which may be associated with weight loss
- Lack of energy and marked fatigue, exhaustion

### 1.12.2 Psychologically and emotionally

- Invasive anxiety and fears
- Panic when you hear about the virus
- Invasive negative thoughts
- Loss of pleasure and lack of interest in activities you used to enjoy

### 1.12.3 Behaviorally

- Difficulty taking on daily tasks
- Avoidance of anyone outside the house, due to a fear of contagion
- Constant monitoring of symptoms related to the virus
- Intense and frequent crying
- Marked irritability and aggressiveness, conflicts with those around them
- Lack of concentration
- Alcohol, drug or medication abuse

If you experience stress, anxiety or depression, you can contact the [Info-Social service \(811\)](#) at any time or the CLSC psychosocial service (418 986-2572), Monday to Friday, from 8 h 30 to 16 h 30. psychosocial intervention professionals will offer support, give you information and advice or guide you, according to your needs.

## Other available resources

- Covid-19 General information Line 1 877 644-4545 (Government of Quebec)
- Covid-19 Information Line for the population 1 833 784-4397 (Government of Canada)
- Pharmacists
- Suicide Prevention Center : 1 866 277-3553

### Websites

- Coronavirus information website of the Government of Quebec:  
<https://www.quebec.ca/sante/problemes-de-sante/az/coronavirus-2019/>

- Ministry of Health and Social Services:  
[www.msss.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca)
- Quebec tourism industry alliance (for entrepreneurs, managers and workers in the Quebec tourism industry).  
<https://alliancetouristique.com>
- [www.passeportsante.net](http://www.passeportsante.net)

The content of this document is strongly inspired by different sources:

- The Internet site of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec
- The *Relive* Body Self-Management Guide to Anxiety
- The Government of Quebec website

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[1] If you want more information for home delivery, the number of the Volunteer Center is 418 986-4649 .