

Dealing With Anxiety & Stress

Devote your time to productive activity, including giving support to others and offering your time and energy in service, writes DEEPAK CHOPRA

Medically speaking, our bodies have evolved to cope with short-term stress over millions of years. But the stress response, so well adapted to sudden events, is ill-prepared for long-term stresses like the Covid-19 pandemic. This is where mental strategy is needed, along with the intention of addressing your own stress level every day.

The best strategy is aimed at anxiety produced by long-term stress. People fear for their health, their jobs, their economic situation — the list goes on. But the cause of anxiety isn't as relevant as the feeling of fear itself. That is what you need to cope with.

Anxiety is related to stress in three ways: It makes you feel helpless and hopeless; it removes the sense of being in control; and it strikes unpredictably and keeps returning.

If you find these factors influencing you, then you need a means to counteract them, noting, however, that in the case of serious chronic anxiety and depression, professional medical help should be sought. Here are some steps for a daily anti-anxiety strategy.

Step 1: Write down your anxious thoughts, then reflect on them and write down a rational replacement. The replacement can be a positive thought, a reality check, or a solution you can carry out.

Example: You think 'This horrible situation will never end.' A rational replacement: 'Yes, it will end.' Or 'I am totally unsafe and threatened.' Write down a solution such as seeking reassurance from a confidant, joining a support group, or helping others to feel

safe, which will add to your sense of safety.

Step 2: Notice anxiety early and dispel it. Assuming that your anxiety is Covid-19 related and not a chronic condition, whenever you feel anxious, take a moment to sit quietly with eyes closed. Take a few deep breaths, then let your attention go to the part of the body where you feel the anxious sensation, such as your heart or the pit of your stomach. Breathing normally, relax and allow this sensation to dissipate naturally. If it persists, continue the exercise until you feel centred, calm, and quiet inside.

Step 3: Stress avoidance: You are connected to the inner and outer worlds through your consciousness. If you devote your awareness to bad news, rumours, online arguments, peculiar theories, and various disasters, you are pulling your consciousness in the wrong direction. Avoid permeating your day with Covid-19 news. A few minutes online or watching the news is more than enough to keep yourself informed. Otherwise, devote your time to productive activity, including giving support to others and offering your time and energy in service.

Step 4: Reassert



your sense of control. Anxiety is persuasive, but it is a primitive response that in the end does not help you to sustain your life or heal your past traumas. Renounce your tendency to feel anxious, lonely, or helpless by doing things that put you back in control. These include:

- Following best prevention through social distancing and wearing a mask.
- Getting vaccinated and talking to anyone who is a vaccine resister if you think you can help change his mind.
- Keeping a journal of your experiences.
- Volunteering to help and support others.
- Being strong for your family and friends.
- Finding productive work during a lockdown.
- Keeping up emotional ties with family and friends.
- Resisting the urge to be isolated, within healthy guidelines. This means staying in communication every day with people who matter to you.

Anxiety-related stress is a disturbing experience, but as you can see, there are many ways by which you can cope and counteract it. Adopt a workable strategy and stick with it. This is what I do personally, and it makes a very stressful situation viable and as normal as it can be under the circumstances. Your goal is to come out of the pandemic feeling stronger and better about yourself. I encourage you to make that your goal starting today. ■

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