

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Second Wave Anxiety: Tips to help



The second wave of COVID-19, and the restrictions and lockdowns it has triggered may cause us heightened fears for the health and safety of our loved ones. Here are some tips to help combat this anxiety.

Have conversations with your friends, loved ones, and household. You may need to make sure you're on the same page with regard to the rules where you are. If someone is not obeying the rules, or has interpreted them differently from you, it may be worth having a discussion with them to be clear about what the rules of your household are. Others may need to vent their frustrations with the rules in order to reach a point of acceptance and compliance. It's okay to support the venting if it leads to acceptance.

You may need to check that elderly relatives are being appropriately cared for and are aware of changing restrictions.

Avoid scrolling. News and social apps can have addictive qualities that make them hard to put down, which can promote stress and anxiety. Give yourself a time limit for checking the news from a trusted source—rather than via social media—and try to stick to it. Using an app timer is a good idea if you find it difficult to put down your devices.

Exercise regularly. Exercise at least 30 minutes a day to stay fit and strong, and to reap the mental health benefits of moving. If rules in your area allow outdoor exercise, try to vary your route or exercise routine to keep it interesting. If you have to exercise indoors, try different workout videos for variety, such as yoga, high-intensity interval training (HIIT), dance classes, or Pilates.

Ask for help when you need it. If you or a member of your household are especially at risk from the virus, you may need an extra pair of hands, or a sympathetic ear, from time to time. Or, you may be under extra pressure having to work from home while managing young kids.

Make a list of friends and neighbours who you could call on if you're likely to need help getting shopping or running errands, or who you could chat to if you need to unload.

Offer help. Helping others has proven psychological benefits. If you're able to, picking up shopping or a prescription for an older or vulnerable neighbour can be an antidote to the COVID-19 blues.

Eat healthy food. Staying hydrated and having a varied diet including plenty of pulses, green leafy vegetables, and protein—and avoiding too much sugar, oil and processed food—are key ways to manage mental health. While there's nothing wrong with having some comfort food if you're feeling stressed, it's important to maintain a healthy diet to reduce overall stress and other negative impacts of a poor diet.

Prioritize good sleep. A good night's sleep is essential for good mental health. Practise good sleep hygiene: never work in your bed, make it every day, change out of your pyjamas in the morning, and establish a night-time routine that includes a screen off time and a wind-down ritual. All of these things help set the stage for improved sleep. If you struggle with insomnia, avoid lying awake in bed too long:

get up and quietly read a book until you feel sleepy so that you don't subconsciously associate bed with being awake.

Practise gratitude. Especially when things are difficult, finding things to be grateful for can improve your mood and mental health. It might be something as small as being grateful for a text from a friend or having made dinner in advance of a busy day of meetings. Make a habit of taking a moment each day to write down one thing you were grateful for.

Try meditation. Mindfulness and meditation can help to reduce anxiety. There are many free apps and audio guides that can help you start off with a meditation practice.

Combat Zoom fatigue. Staring at screens too much can have negative implications for physical and mental health. For tips on ways to reduce the risk of video call burnout, read our article here. As with any sustained computer activity, develop a habit of looking away from the screens for at least 20 seconds after 20 minutes of sustained work.

Avoid drugs and alcohol. Some people choose to use drugs and alcohol to try to deal with anxiety. While this may not seem to be a problem, ultimately these options only increase symptoms of stress and anxiety. If you're tempted by alcohol or cigarettes, avoid having them in your house. If you find yourself drinking more than the recommended amount, or misusing prescription drugs or narcotics, speak to your GP.

Speak to a counsellor. If you're finding it difficult to manage, speak to a caring counsellor via your assistance program. They're available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can also speak to your GP and ask for a psychology referral.

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