



Is there a healthy way to worry about the pandemic?

Living through a pandemic tends to lead to many emotions, not the least of which is worry and anxiety. Many people feel that they have no control over what is happening, and this is leading to heightened fear and anxiety.

Now more than ever it is important to find ways to manage our stress levels in a healthy way.

Recent research conducted by the New Orleans School of Medicine shows that stress can actually alter the structure of the brain. According to the findings, a stressful event often leads to rapid and lasting changes in the brain cells that transmit information between nerve cells.

“The experience of traumatic events can lead to neuropsychiatric disorders including anxiety, depression and drug addiction,” says Dr Liu. “This knowledge is necessary for developing strategies to prevent or treat these common stress-related neurological disorders.”

By understanding how we interact with stress, we can come up with methods that allow us to manage it better - both now and after the pandemic has passed.

Make small changes to your lifestyle to accommodate the situation better

According to Hanlie Raath, psycho-therapist and relationship coach, the assimilation of our emotional reactions will take longer, and may surface in a new form. “Once we have gained physical control and protected ourselves on that level, we might need to address aspects of our more hidden fears, and anger - but also our dreams. In other words, instead of letting our fears surrounding the pandemic run away with us, we can use this time to deal with underlying issues and address the reason for our heightened emotions.”

It’s important that you put aside time in the day to address anxious thoughts and feelings, and put your fears on paper and describe what you’re worried about.

Studies have shown that when people learn to work with their anxiety in this way, they experience a reduction in intrusive thoughts throughout the day. Most often, the things we worry about are just that: worries, not realities.

Put this to practice by actively blocking out a 30-minute slot during the day to think about and write down your anxious thoughts. After a few days, you should have some useful insight into your psyche, and be able to reframe some of the issues. For example, if you’ve written: “I’m worried that I’ll never be able to get my life back in order,” you should challenge this and - for example - rewrite: “I can choose to reject or embrace

change, and my perspective will have a big impact on how I manage matters going forward.” Over time, the habit will have formed, and your time won’t be overtaken with anxious thoughts. Complete the circle by going back and put down ideas of how you can get your life back in order.

Choose connection and relationship during this time

Connection is important. If you are isolating with your family, now is the time to develop better relations and bonds.

Raath explains that, instead of being frustrated that family members aren’t helping around the house, get them to join you washing the dishes. “Have some fun with it, and put on a song to dance to while you’re at it. Enjoy some inspiration, humour, and random thoughts. It’s important that we maintain an existence outside of the lockdown and the pandemic, which can easily overwhelm regular topics.”

Other experts agree that one should try and engage in family activities that don’t involve the virus or pandemic. Do something fun every day. For example, as a family you could sit down and watch WildEarth. tv and enjoy wild game as if you were on a game reserve.

Lower your expectations and try to be receptive to the range of emotions being expressed

Fear, anger, pain, shame and confusion need to be felt. The circumstances demand that we take our own emotional pulse, and check with others with patience, understanding and compassion.

Stay positive by setting goals

Dr Jacques Jordaan a lecturer and undergraduate coordinator at the University of Orange Free State’s Faculty of Humanities says that at this time it is really important that people still have to set goals (even smaller goals) for themselves and try to achieve them.

It’s also important for your family to have goals as well.

“Fortunately, when it comes to children, most schools have provided parents with study material to keep their children busy educationally. Alternatively, parents should create some form of structure and routine for their children during the lockdown. Families can play board games and create their own fun activities. Children should also be allowed to engage with their friends via social media if they become lonely.”

Dr. Jordaan also encourages parents to allow their children to share their worries and concerns openly. He believes that individuals need to be prepared because when this mandatory period of isolation ends, everyone will have to resume their normal activities.



Don't be afraid to seek help

Dr. Jordaan further adds, "If not addressed, these experiences of overwhelming loneliness, sadness or lack of meaning may continue long after the lockdown has ended. Individuals who experience depression and loneliness after the lockdown should reach out to others, try to eat healthy foods, do fun things, and exercise more. Social distancing is vital at this stage, but as South African citizens, we must remember that we are not going through this alone. We are isolated from others, but together we are all fighting the same battle against COVID-19."

If your fear is becoming overwhelming or someone in your home is struggling with ongoing mental health issues, it's vital that they know they have access to support from a registered healthcare provider that is equipped to deal with the complexity of the condition.



If you or your loved one needs support during this time, reach out to your ICAS EHWP via your toll-free number or the ICAS On-the-Go App to seek counselling support.

Source: HealthCloud

References:

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