

# Coping with stress and anxiety caused by COVID-19



It's normal for people to be stressed and feel overwhelmed in a pandemic. The uncertainty and the fact that our normal routines have been upended requires adaptability.

**Although stress and anxiety are used interchangeably, they are different.**

## **This how to tell the difference:**

Stress is a normal response to an unknown situation that occurs unexpectedly. Stress is your friend because it makes your brain produce adrenaline which will help you respond to the perceived harmful event, attack, or threat.

Dr. Sonia Lupien is a research scientist at the Centre for Studies on Human Stress, University of Montreal. In her series of conferences on stress called Mammoths (Mammoths), she compares danger to a mammoth ready to charge you. In this situation, we know that stress is good for you because it will generate a fight-or-flight response<sup>1</sup>. However, we also know that prolonged and repeated periods of stress can be harmful to your physical and psychological health. If we apply the mammoth analogy, freezing for a few seconds and being paralyzed by fear will put you in mortal danger. This emotion is called fear. Fear can become anxiety when you think about a situation over and over, whether directly or indirectly. Just like stress, anxiety is a normal response to a threat and stems from fear. However, anxiety is considered a problem when it occurs at inappropriate times, frequently or when its intensity and duration affect a person's normal activities<sup>2</sup>.

Individuals experience anxiety at different levels. Our perception of the event will greatly influence the intensity of the anxiety.



Read all  
about it here!

## Tips and advice on managing anxiety

### Focus on what you can control

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#### I have no control over this (let it go)

- The availability of goods and services in a store
- My reaction and the reaction of others
- The failure of others to respect social distancing rules
- The duration of the pandemic
- The financial impacts
- The educational impacts
- What will happen in the future
- The decisions made by my employer



#### I have control over this (I can do something)

- **STAY AT HOME**
- My use of social media
- My willingness to follow the rules
- My Internet and substance consumption
- My positive attitude
- My patience and benevolence
- My choice of activities
- My personal hygiene
- My physical distancing
- My intake of information
- The support that I can offer my family and friends

## When to seek help?

In general, we overcome moments of stress, anxiety and depression. However, when moments turn into weeks or months, symptoms tend to persist or worsen. The following symptoms can indicate a worsening situation:

### Physically

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- Upset stomach, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, nausea
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite leading to weight loss
- Low energy, chronic fatigue and exhaustion

### Psychologically

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- Anxiety, negative and intrusive thoughts
- State of panic when hearing about the virus
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities that used to be enjoyable

### Behaviourally

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- Trouble doing everyday tasks
- Staying more than two metres from everyone outside for fear of contagion
- Constantly monitoring for virus-related symptoms
- Frequent and intense crying
- Increased irritability and aggression, conflicts with loved ones
- Loss of concentration
- Consuming too much alcohol, drugs or medication

## Additional resources

Are you worried about the coronavirus pandemic?



**All SSQ Insurance insureds have access to a free assistance hotline.  
Hotline Number • 1-877-480-2240**



### Internet

**Chloe:** An automated medical assistant that provides access to the latest public health information and resources: <https://covid19.dialogue.co/#/>

### Sources:

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/stress-anxiety-and-depression-associated-with-the-coronavirus-covid-19-disease/#c47205>

1. E stress or How to Hunt a Mammoth Without Getting Trampled, Conference on October 10, 2018
2. Barnhill, John W. MD, Weill Cornell Medical College and New York Hospital, Manurel MSD, Octobre 2018