

# Managing Anxiety about Covid 19

The Psycho-oncology Team

## What's a "Normal" Response?

We are being asked to take unusual measures to reduce the rate at which Covid 19 spreads in the population. A near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel threatened.

Fear is a normal response to threat. Our fear response is ultimately designed to keep us safe. However, when faced with this level of exposure to a possible threat, coupled with further uncertainty about what the future will hold, this may easily spiral out of control to cause severe anxiety, especially if you already experience anxiety.

Fear commonly involves a 'Fight, flight, freeze' response – it is normal to experience feelings of anxiety and panic, for your heart to be racing, your breathing more rapid/shallow, to experience fatigue, concentration and sleep difficulties. You might find yourself preoccupied and overwhelmed with worries about getting the virus, having the virus, and fear for yourself and your loved ones.

## What Keeps My Anxiety Going?

With anxiety it helps to understand that what we pay attention to and what we do as a result of the information we gather, can have a considerable impact on our anxiety levels.

The "vicious flower" model is often used to understand how anxiety is maintained and spirals. So each petal on the flower represents a different type of concern that feeds into your anxiety. For example if you have a tendency to worry about your physical health, you may be more hypervigilant to symptoms, or if you already have a fear of contamination or germs, your sense of threat may increase which will increase your anxiety.



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## Prevent Anxiety from increasing by changing your Coping strategies:

1. Limit your news intake to once a day, around the same time (or less if possible)
  - a. Watch a reputable news program which summarises the day's news.
  - b. Get your updates from reputable sources so you are dealing with facts rather than panic related advice from general media sources <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
2. Stop googling Coronavirus symptoms. If you have concerns related to your current illness or illness status, talk directly to your medical team.
3. Give yourself a break from Social Media. Limit your time online and aim to increase the time away from social media news updates to longer and longer –bearing in mind staying connected is important.
4. Thinking about whether you have been contaminated will increase your hypervigilance for symptoms and your anxiety. Instead:
  - a. If you are concerned take decisive action - decide if you have the main COVID 19 symptoms (e.g. high temperature of more than 37.8 degrees centigrade or a continual cough).
  - b. Contact your oncology team or call the Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658
  - c. If you haven't got any new symptoms give yourself permission to stop thinking about it.

