

# 5 Ways to Refresh Your Wellness Strategies

## *Coping with stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic*

Many of us were anxious at the beginning of the pandemic but were able to get through it with some strategies and support. Now, some people may be feeling more anxious. We believed that things were improving and we started to get our hopes up. But with COVID-19 numbers increasing, we are back to feeling anxious and uncertain about how bad it will get and when this will all end.

It's normal to feel this way: There are many uncertainties that come with the pandemic, particularly with ongoing waves of the virus. This includes not knowing whether schools will remain open and how much our jobs, businesses, finances and health will be impacted. You may be thinking, "I cannot take any more of this."

When anxiety persists over a long period, it can be particularly challenging. It can also lead to frustration and anger and feelings of helplessness and even depression.

What can you do now?

### 1. Focus on what has worked, and what you can control

First, remember what you already did to cope with the first wave of the pandemic. In March 2020 the world faced an unprecedented and uncertain situation that understandably caused anxiety and stress for many people. However, one step at a time, we got through it despite the challenges. Think of what strategies you used to cope during the past few months – keep doing them. They worked before and will likely be helpful again.

Also remember other times in your life when you faced uncertainty. How did you get through it? What strategies did you use then?

Feeling anxious about uncertainty can often be caused by not having control over what will happen in the future.

Take some time to focus on everyday activities, tasks or situations where you do have some control. This can help you feel productive and give you a sense of accomplishment. Remember, this doesn't mean that you should feel pressure to 'do' or 'create.' There are many small ways to feel a sense of control or accomplishment in your daily life:

If you are working, focus on how you feel when you complete tasks that are connected to your job.

If you live with others, focus on how you feel when you help them prepare for their day or support them to accomplish their own tasks (e.g., preparing meals for others to enjoy or helping students with homework).

If you have pets, focus on how you feel by taking them for walks, giving them a bath, or playing with them.

This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit [www.camh.ca/covid19](http://www.camh.ca/covid19)

## 2. Consider trying new things

If 'doing' and 'creating' helps to give you a sense of accomplishment:

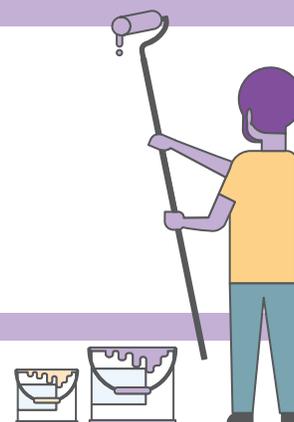


Consider taking up a hobby. It doesn't have to cost a lot. For example, your local dollar store may have supplies for painting, colouring or creating arts and crafts. There are also free tutorials and resources online to do things like learning to sew, dance or speak another language. As another option, someone in your network might consider teaching you something or starting a hobby with you that you can discuss together over the phone or video as a way to connect in a new way.

Consider remotely contributing to or volunteering for a cause that is meaningful to you. Focus on how it makes you feel to create positive change in the world.



Consider making a small or inexpensive change in your living environment, such as painting a room or reorganizing a closet or the kitchen pantry.



Let go of things you cannot control, such as worrying about what life will be like when this is over. Remember, when this started you may not have felt you would be able to cope with the lockdown. Yet you made it through – you adjusted to the new way of living. You will do that again.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were many things we did not understand about COVID-19. As time has passed, we have learned much about COVID-19 and this information has enabled us to adjust our behaviours. For example, we now know that wearing masks, keeping six feet apart and limiting time inside helps to reduce virus transmission.

## 3. Stay connected with positive supports

Continuing to focus on the uncertainty is not helpful, nor is talking to other people who constantly want to focus on the negative. Reach out to people who have a balanced view – who know it's important to take precautions to minimize the spread of the virus but are also hopeful that things will get better. Talk about how you are feeling and get support.

## 4. Practise acceptance

Accepting what is happening does not mean that you are giving up. And accepting that you will feel anxious does not mean that you are resigning yourself to feeling miserable. Acceptance means acknowledging that this is how you are feeling right now.

The opposite is to fight against the anxiety – but isn't that what you have been trying to do? We know that fighting the anxiety only makes it worse and keeps us stuck. So remind yourself that yes, this doesn't feel good and it's not fair that you have to go through this. But this is happening whether you like it or not... so now what can you do to handle it? Acceptance allows us to focus on solving problems we can actually solve.

Here is an example:

*“I’m worried that a winter lockdown will be worse than it was in the spring. I won’t be able to leave the house and I’ll be stuck without supplies.”*

Worrying about this keeps you stuck – it keeps you thinking “what if...”

Instead, acceptance looks something like this:

*“I’m not happy about another wave. I feel anxious about it. I am worried about supplies. I will make a list and go out and buy what I need. I will also have a back up plan in case I run out of things and cannot go out myself. I acknowledge these worries, but I am going to take a breath and practise letting them go – and bring my attention elsewhere to things where I can make a difference.”*

By accepting rather than fighting the situation and the anxiety, your anxiety may become less intense. This can take a lot of practice because you are typically used to fighting against your negative emotions. But keep at it. Acceptance allows you to take a breath, practise letting go – and bring your attention to things where you can make a difference.



## 5. Practise mindfulness

Maybe you have been coping by trying to stay busy all the time. While this is a strategy that can help you, it’s important to also take time to slow down. Practise mindfulness. Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being aware of what you are feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. It has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety. You can practise for a few minutes each day or longer if you wish.