

MENTAL WELLNESS

in the Corona-Verse

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[Note: These thoughts are for 'normal' functioning adults.

I'm not addressing people who have been previously diagnosed with Depression, Panic attacks, Bipolar etc.]



How is stress showing up for you?

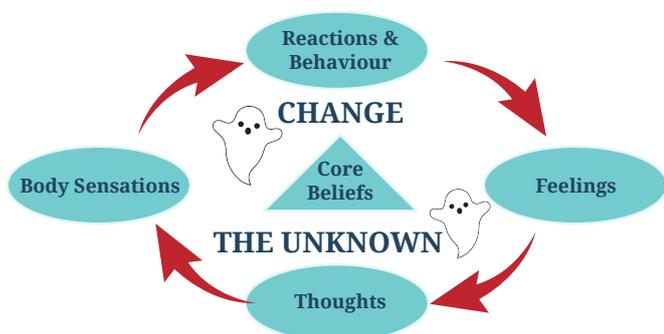
Even the most resilient of you will be experiencing some symptoms of anxiety. It may show up as changes in your sleeping patterns or appetite; physical tension in the jaw or shoulders; strange dreams; snapping at loved ones or literally 'crying over spilt milk'. Your nervous system is trying to adapt to your changed routine, of being locked up indoors all day, or suddenly being up close and personal with the family, hour by hour.

What are the changes we are facing?

Extroverts are happy in lockdown with good friends, as they need to connect. Introverts might be ok if they can get loads of alone time to self-soothe. The experience of lockdown could be likened to a stint in prison or rehab. Those of you who have participated in extreme sports may have the stamina or resilience to withstand the lockdown of normalcy. The combination of self-isolation, job insecurity, extreme change of daily routine, loss of social contact, extensive online use, no dance class, no art class, shopping malls, workplaces, gyms, beauty salons, or book shops to browse in. No outdoor fix for the nature junkie; no beach nor promenade run; or ice-cold dips in the ocean. All those random spontaneous acts that kept our spirits alive are also over. Even a nap in the sun doesn't feel like the delicious moment it used to be. Yes, your mind/body/soul is involved in a big-time adjustment.

Why & how must we expect anxiety to rise?

For me, there are two major reasons for the stress: the change and the unknown. There are four ways we react to stress: thoughts, feelings, sensations and behaviour. The uncertainties, as well as our stress response, have ramped up big time. The unknown relates to the unpredictability of the future and the volatility of things. The virus, our work-life, family wellbeing and future doubts pervade our thoughts. Our minds are working overtime. These thoughts impact on our feelings, bodies and behaviour.



Thoughts

Will I get the virus? Will my loved ones? How sick will I get? Will I have to go to the hospital? What if there are no ventilators, or good care? Who will care for me? When will I go back to work? Will my job be safe? Will I lose all my money? How will I pay the staff? Can my company survive and for how long? Will my investments be safe? When will this all pass? *Once we have gone over and over the scenarios we may get to the few deep philosophical ones.* Who am I in these times? What can I learn? What actions are best? How can I serve? How is my soul? What is most important now and how can I meet that?

It will not be possible to stop these thoughts but there are ways of calming, redirecting or distracting them. More than ever, the habit of engaging with what is wrong has trapped us in a negaverse.

How do we stay well?

The Body first

For me, the first thing to be addressed is almost at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Your body. This is where the survival mechanism of 'fight and flight' clicks in. The sympathetic nervous system is in overdrive. It's easy to forget that you have an animal body. The desks, concrete surfaces and the sterile environment are not good for it for long periods. It needs to connect to nature, to the earth, sun and water. It desires more flow and to experience the senses. For starters: feel that racing heart, that clenched jaw, that shortness of breath, those headaches or strange aches. No, it's probably not the virus: it's stress. You need to take care of the body now. Enough sleep (even if it's daytime naps), eat right, exercise, breath deeper, stretch and relax the tensions. I'd recommend dance for these times as the body can express itself. Then any nature contact is good, as well as touch and tactile luxuries.

Feelings

Feelings need to be felt. Do a check-in at least five times a day and name or rate your feelings. Naming them helps you achieve distance for a minute and rating helps you monitor whether things are getting better or worse. On a scale from 1-10, how are you feeling?



If your feelings keep hanging out near 10 then you need to find professional help.

Reactions and Behaviour

Are you battling to focus? Are you unable to get out of bed? Demotivated? Snapping at loved ones? Reaching for alcohol or another cookie? Obsessed with the news? Unable to work and unable to follow your schedule? If it's yes to a few of these then it is time to prioritise wellness. High-stress levels lead to erratic behaviour and irrational decisions. Hold back on big decisions and remind yourself to open to different perspectives.

What can you do?

1. Feel the strange feelings. Acknowledge the loss of all that you normally enjoy. Frustration may well up, feel it! Then anger, then shock, then loss. There will be a whole range of feelings that need to be felt. Journal these feelings. Keep a daily record. Approach yourself with kindness and compassion. Imagine, as Rumi (the poet) says: that you are a guest house and welcome in all these feelings as 'guests'. When the bad ones stay for longer, then imagine the more pleasant 'guests' and invite them in. I like to imagine the best outcome and allow good feelings to arise. It shifts pessimism.

2. Talk things through with a buddy. Name a friend as your 'check-in' buddy. You are in physical isolation but not social isolation. You can reach out. Be honest. You can talk. Have a laugh together. Try connecting with a group of friends with **Zoom** or **House-Party** apps.

3. Make a self-care plan. Set up some online classes. Wellness options are on YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, Instagram and on apps like **Headspace**, **Calm** and **Insight Timer**. There is a lot out there so tailor your week with things you enjoy so that you look forward to the classes. DO NOT get FOMO because your friends are doing other classes. Stick with what suits you. An online gym session; a yoga class; an art group, a scrabble group or a book club. Take time out to read, write, sketch and find some alone

time. Create a happy playlist of your favourite music genre. Baths and showers can become pampering rituals. Get fresh air daily even if it is breathing the window. Take an interest in the sky, the clouds and the birds on a daily basis. I highly recommend waking at sunrise and enjoying the pause as the night turns into day.

4. Achieve something daily. This can be work or anything that brings you satisfaction. Even if it's as simple as tidying out a drawer, or reading a poem. Then say to yourself: "this is enough"- **being** is more important than **doing** right now. Do something physical like plant a pot, weed the garden, change a tyre or paint a wall. Time limit IT and take a break from hard surfaces and screens.

5. Check-in with your thoughts. Stop looking at the dramatic news. Find the website that gives you the best data, facts and advice and stop feeding the frenzy of worry. Is this worry or thought helpful or unhelpful? Can I find another perspective? Take a bird's eye view. Be open to different options. Accept more and react less. There is not much you can control except your attitude and where you focus your attention. Calm your thoughts with the ideas below, or distract them by doing something you enjoy.

6. Soulful and mindful practices. What brings you meaning? What calms the heart and soul? These are very important to include right now. I love to sketch flowers or leaves, listen to the birds, write poetry or meditate. Be mindful of the little things. Make your tea slowly, savour your meal, smile and look in the eyes of your loved one. I like to let go of thinking and open to my sense and simple awareness. Sit still in meditation - use a guided one or try yoga nidra. Try praying, listen to soothing music, saying mantras or sing and hum. I listen to a spiritual teacher daily and allow my mind to contemplate higher truths. Metta is an awesome meditation that teaches loving compassion. Begin your gratitude book again. These practices will help calm you. Begin one now.

Megan de Beyer, MA (Psychology), MSc (Holistic Ecology), has a 30-year career as a psychologist. She facilitates the popular course "Strong Mothers – Strong Sons" that runs at most independent boys' schools in South Africa. She is a prolific inspirational speaker at events and conferences, and on television and radio. Megan was the teen expert at parent24.com and, along with Vanessa Raphael, was the co-founder of The Village Facebook group, which has 36 000 followers and gives advice to parents of teens. Since 2003, Megan has written for every major woman's magazine in South Africa and has frequently been interviewed on the radio. She has successfully developed four parenting courses that she offers at schools around South Africa, Australia and the USA. Megan is the mother of two young men. She distils her tricks, tips and methods into her first book 'How to Raise a Man'; a penguin book focused on raising boys.

Drawing on Eastern Philosophy as well as Western psychology, the processes and ideas in this book will help mothers survive the teens with their sanity intact. She is presently running online seminars for mothers raising teens @howtoraiseaman on Facebook.

[Click here for Megan's website](#)

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Helplines for Professional Help

Lifeline 086 132 2322 • Depression & Anxiety 0800 708 090 • Gender Violence 0800 150 150
Childline 0800 55555 • Suicide Helpline 0800 567 567 • Substance Abuse 0800 121 314 • Cell Phone Emergency 112