

# Coronavirus: General Mental Health Coping Strategies<sup>1</sup>

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The coronavirus pandemic can significantly affect mental health for **everyone**. In addition to the fear of one or one's family contracting the disease, the future uncertainty, possible loss of income and savings, as well as the loneliness and isolation, can trigger a range of overwhelming feelings. Rather than denying or pushing them away, if we treat and **accept** these feelings as normal in this situation, in a **non-judgmental** way and with **self-compassion**, it will enable us to use many practical coping strategies available to us to protect our mental health. Feelings that may overwhelm us include:

**Anxiety:** Key worries related to the coronavirus pandemic include:

- Worry about falling sick or someone in the family becoming ill
- Anxiety around death, and not being able to be by the side of one's family
- Retirement or college savings being obliterated
- Income loss due to workplace closure or reduced hours at work.
- Not being able to afford testing or treatment when needed
- Being at risk of exposure to the virus because one can't afford to stay home and miss work

*"Anxiety is removed by faith in the Lord; the faith that tells you that whatever happens is for the best and that the Lord's Will be done" ~ Sathya Sai Baba, Venkatagiri, Apr 1957.*

**Loneliness:** Social distancing is critical to slowing the spread of the coronavirus, but it can also lead to isolation and loneliness. Many will grieve the loss of social connection and social support from family and friends. Numerous studies have shown the adverse [mental health and physical impact](#) of loneliness, including the potential to trigger a depressive episode.

*"I am in you, with you, above you, behind you, protecting you at all times, just as the eyelids protect the eye" ~ Sathya Sai Baba*

## Traumatic Stress

Individuals who have been [quarantined](#) may also experience negative psychological effects including post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion and anger caused by the lack of certainty, lack of safety and loss of normalcy. The threat of the loss of income and savings and the inability to provide for basic needs like food and shelter may also lead one to be in a perpetual state of hypervigilance or exhaustion.

*"Difficulties are part and parcel of the lives of great devotees. God subjects His devotees to tests so that their faith in Him can be strengthened and their hearts purified. However, God will never impose suffering on you that you cannot bear. Difficulties are meant for cleansing the vessel of your heart. Do not be afraid of difficulties as they are like passing clouds; do not waver. Follow your heart, which is steady and unwavering" ~ Sathya Sai Baba, Vol 31, Christmas, 1998.*

With an awareness of these mental health risks, we can work towards coping with this challenging situation and reduce the impact on our mental health. Here is a list of coping strategies to help get you through these uncertain times.

### **Be mindful Your News Consumption**

- Don't overload on watching news/information all day long. Instead read a book or listen to an inspirational podcast.
- Rely on only one or two *reliable* sources of news as misinformation and bad reporting are rampant. The [CDC](#) is a great resource.
- Check for updates **just one or two times a day**. Take in only what you need to know, what's most relevant to you and your community.

### **Make a Health Disruption Plan**

- Learn about coronavirus preventive measures from reliable sources, such as the [CDC](#).
- Speak to your healthcare advisor about coronavirus precautions specific to your health needs, including a health disruption plan.
- Continue with therapy/medical appointments. Many practitioners are now offering telemedicine either by phone or video.
- Make a plan for your household needs —a shopping list, a pharmacy list.
- Make sure you have an adequate supply of medication and take it as prescribed.
- Develop an emergency plan, especially for *elderly* members of the family.

### **Stay Socially Connected**

- Stay connected with friends and family by Skype, Facetime, email, messenger and text, especially those who may be isolated.
- Check on the elderly who live alone or those self-isolating because of their immuno-suppressed condition. Help them out by shopping or running errands for them. Helping others has been a proven antidote to loneliness or depression.
- Spend time reconnecting with your good friends/inner circle. Be ready to listen to their concerns and share yours. Learn effective listening skills to help them.

### **Create a structure and a work routine at home**

- Avoid working into the night, sleeping in and logging onto your computer from your bed. Instead, stick to a regular bedtime and waking schedule. Shower and dress in the morning and keep normal working hours like you usually would.
- Develop a routine and set clear boundaries between work/home when at home. Designate a work area. If the couch is where you normally watch TV or scroll through social media, you may get distracted if you try to work from there.
- When quarantine leads to a feeling of powerlessness and entrapment, creating a structure at home helps. Focus on the things you do have control- making meals, creating time for games with family members, listening to or playing music
- Household chores, such as spring cleaning, will give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment when completed.

## Take Care of Yourself

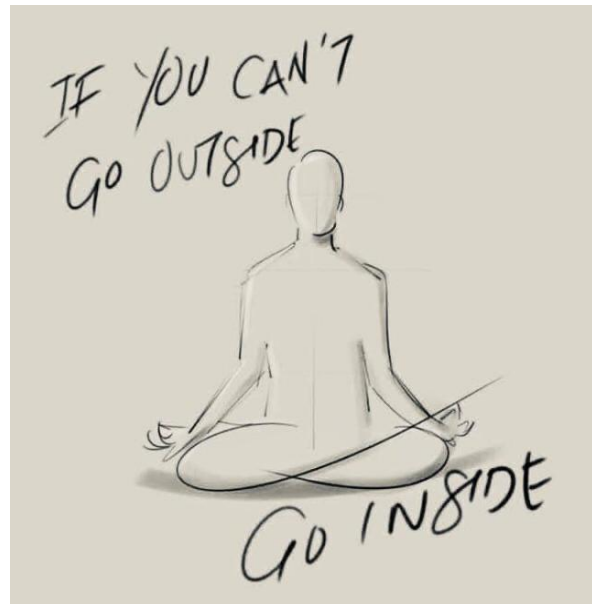
- Make your physical health a priority during this time.
- Stick to consistent meal times, rather than stress-snacking throughout the day. Nourish yourself with healthy foods.
- Exercise is an excellent stress-reliever and mood-booster. Keep moving. Try out exercise routines or an online yoga app. Allow fresh air and sunlight in.
- Find healthy ways to address your stress, such as journaling and calling a loved one. Take a walk in the woods. Be with Nature as this will provide you with a sense of well-being and have a calming effect on you.
- Practice mindfulness. Take deep breaths during the day. Try not to ruminate on the future or worst-case scenarios. There are many online resources such as YouTube guided meditation and apps such as [Headspace](#).

Remember His words: *Life is a challenge! Meet it! This too shall pass!*

## Refocus your energy within:

Engage in activities that refocuses your energy from the external events to within.

- Use this time to build on your spiritual sadhana through Namasmara and meditation. Take this time as a gift to refocus, to slow down and reflect
- A gratitude journal- Acknowledge what you are grateful for. Helps rewire your brain and encourages it to seek out more things to be grateful for. It also helps you stay positive
- Take the wonderful opportunity to listen to the many inspirational online talks being offered by the SSIO and reflect on their message.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from National Alliance of Mental Illness Blog March 2020. <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/March-2020/Coronavirus-Mental-Health-Coping-Strategies>

<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/March-2020/How-to-Protect-Your-Mental-Health-during-the-Coronavirus-Outbreak>

<sup>2</sup> Sathya Sai International Organization of the United States of America