

Safeguarding psychological wellbeing during COVID-19

Global epidemics, public health warnings and the outbreak of a disease like the coronavirus (COVID-19) can sometimes appear frightening. With continuous media coverage, unverified stories on social media and uncertain outcomes, it's common to feel overwhelmed and worried about yours, or your family's health and wellbeing. While these feelings are understandable, if they start to interfere with your everyday life, you may be experiencing health anxiety.

How you can help yourself

While it's reasonable to be concerned about the coronavirus, there are simple and effective steps you can take to help take care of yourself, and the people around you.

1. **Know the facts:** Get information or updates from reputable sources. Avoid getting information from social media or second-hand information from people who aren't experts in the field. Instead, look at official government websites.
2. **Know when to switch off:** Every day we're exposed to new information or updates about the coronavirus – on the news, social media or through conversations. While it's important to be informed, over-exposure can lead to increased feelings of anxiety or worry. If you notice yourself becoming anxious, switch off and take a break from the news to focus on your self-care.
3. **Keep things in perspective:** While it's understandable to be concerned about the number of those affected worldwide, it's important to remember that most people who contract the virus, make a full recovery. Keeping things in perspective will help you stay calm.
4. **Stay connected:** Connecting with the people around us improves our level of resilience. Although it's not recommended to be in contact with people when you're feeling ill, you can still stay connected by phone, video-call, or text message. If you've noticed that you're feeling worried or anxious,

reach out to your friends and family and let them know how you're feeling.

What is health anxiety?

Health anxiety is a mental health issue characterised by feelings of worry, anxiety or fear about your health and wellbeing. Some of the symptoms include stress that's out of proportion to the impact of the event, an inability to set aside a worry, and feeling restless.

What are the signs and symptoms of health anxiety?

In response to the coronavirus, you may experience, some worry and anxiety, feelings of helplessness, becoming withdrawn or avoiding public places, hypervigilance about health and hygiene, and even confusion, especially when we're getting information from so many different sources.

People with elevated health anxiety might experience severe anxious thoughts that interrupt their daily life.

Common symptoms of anxiety include:

- difficulty concentrating
- restlessness
- rapid heartbeat
- trembling or shaking
- feeling light-headed or faint
- numbness or nausea
- sweating

It is when you become so consumed by worry that it affects your ability to work, socialise or complete everyday tasks, that you need to stop and listen.

If you, or someone you know needs support, please call **Lifeline Fiji** on their national (Fiji) 24/7 Toll Free crisis intervention helpline **132-454** or visit their website www.lifelinefiji.com for more information about their services.