

Reducing Mental Health Risks for General Public and Caregivers during the nCOVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak

nCOVID-19 pandemic disease and the strict steps by the government agencies to reduce the risk of community transmission are new adverse situations which all of us across age groups had never experienced before. Therefore, the daily life hassles due to the situation, restricted freedom of mobility and socialization, uncertainty of continuation of the situation, rumors in social media, and moreover, the fear of getting affected or dying from the disease, etc. have the potentiality to induce stress, fear, panic, anxiety, and apprehension. Hence, having such feelings and thoughts are generally considered normal and common.

In many cases, these feelings may force you to follow the social distance guidelines more strictly, which in a way is good for you and others. However, minimizing these thoughts and feeling needs to be done to control overwhelming emotions and excessive nCOVID-19 related thoughts, to optimize your daily life functioning, and to promote better mental health and quality of life.

Remember, we all are equally at risk to get infected by this virus. People who have a travel history during this period or who are already being infected or who are with a history of chronic illness or elderly people with co-morbidities are at higher risk. We would like to draw your attention to the followings:

1. Restrict the time spent reading/listening/discussing/watching nCOVID-19 related news, social media message/videos, and telephonic conversations. Apply the same principles for children below 18years and elderly at home/hospital.
2. Refer only to authentic sources (such as government or World Health Organisation documents) for nCOVID-19 related facts and figures.
3. Take extra precautions for elderly at home as they are at higher risk to fall ill due to co-morbidities and aging process. Address their fear and anxiety related to nCOVID-19. Spend time with them and reassure them that government has taken all required steps for treatment. And treatment is available and effective.
4. Eat your normal diet or little less. Since spending of energy is limited due to restricted mobility and slower pace of life, this will minimize the risk of unwanted weight gain.

5. Sleep adequately. 6-8 hours of daily sleep is recommended for all. Small children need more sleep and elderly who may need more or less sleep depending upon their normal sleep pattern. Try not to sleep during day-time and maintain sleep hygiene.
6. Keep self-care following hygiene and social distance practice intact. Clean your mobiles at least 2 times a day, if you are at home, and if you go out then every time you come back from outside.
7. Don't indulge in more smoking or drinking alcohol. Rather this is the best time to quit this habit to improve the capacity of our lungs and and make our body and mind ready to fight the infection. As this virus directly attacks our lung, it is our duty towards us to quit any such damaging habit.
8. Make use of the time in completing pending things/matter, reviving activities which used to make you happy, reconnecting to family/friends with whom you talked since ages, following some kind of daily exercise schedule, doing something new and productive, etc. Moreover, kindly do whatever makes you happy and satisfied. It will be engaging if you involve children in few of activities you choose to do.
9. Do pray if it is ok, but definitely do deep breathing and keep silence for some time daily. This will bring calmness to you.
10. Talk to people to avoid creating or circulating fake messages on social media. Don't forward any message/video related to nCOVID-19 without ensuring its authenticity.
11. Even sitting idle for few days or loitering for a while or hours is ok. Don't get restless or feel useless or think it as wastage of time. It is situational and this phase will go away like any good or bad phase of life. At the same time, don't waste time on all the days as it may result in guilt feelings and anger towards self later on.
12. If you work from home, get time for yourself, your family (especially children and elderly at home), and share the burden of some household chores.
13. Restrain yourself from hoarding grocery, food-stuff, etc. as the supply chain for emergency items is and will be maintained throughout this period. This behaviour in some people might induce fear and anxiety in other people. We must be responsible for our fellow citizens by curbing unnecessary fear and panic.

14. Take care of yourself, your family, and your community by following government guidelines. If you find yourself with overwhelming and uncontrollable fear, anxiety, and distress don't fail to seek health care.

Specific situations:

15. If you have a patient who is infected with nCOVID-19 virus at home or hospital, ensure effective isolation strictly as instructed by the health agencies. This will prevent the risk of you being infected and also prevent its community transmission.

- a. Stay in regular contact (largely telephonic and in person whenever the hospital asks you) with the hospital where the patient is being treated.
- b. Follow all instructions and guidelines provided or told by the hospital/treating team.
- c. Talk normally to the patient and address his/her queries/apprehensions with facts and figure and as suggested by the treating team.
- d. Provide factual information about his/her health condition and assurance regarding recovery.
- e. For more serious patient who is admitted at the hospital, just provide the exact information about his/her health as said by the treating team. Don't make any false promise regarding quick recovery, however, do convey the availability of medical and familial support with lot of assurance.
- f. Listen patiently to the expressed emotions especially, in case of elderly they may repeat same concerns. Take extra precautions regarding quarantine and isolation, or hygiene practices particularly, for elderly with memory issues.
- g. While your patient is recovered and discharged don't forget to extend your gratitude towards the treating team.

16. If there is a death in the family due to nCOVID-19 or due to any other chronic/acute health condition, do follow death rituals but in a minimized manner while strictly maintaining social distance and hygiene practices.

17. If you have a patient who is already under continued medical treatment for any existing mental illness, please explore the possibility of telephonic contact for follow up. Many hospitals have started tele-psychiatry facility. Take extra care of such patients to minimize their anxiety, apprehension, and panic as due to the

adverse situation of nCOVID-19 these behaviours/emotions may increase. Don't react to their expressed emotions negatively. If situation is not under your control, you may bring the patient to emergency department of any hospital nearby your home.

18. If you have a patient who is dependent on critical health care facilities, seek information regarding the continuation of functioning of such medical departments in the respective hospitals where the treatment is followed-up or any nearby hospital, which has such facilities.

Let us ponder over the positive side of the nCOVID-19:

We need to be happy about considering these important facts in life now a days: such as reduction of air, noise, and water pollution; beautiful sky and trees, reduction in crimes around us, chirping of variety of birds and calmness in our surroundings, availability of plenty of time for ourselves and family, and about the way all of us respect the health, hygiene, and social distancing guidelines.

In addition, we all need to extend our humble gratitude towards the health-workers, emergency service providers, government departments, and people who feed millions of needy people/animals daily during this difficult time. We also need to extend our sincere thanks to people who have offered financial help to the government to meet the exigency expenses during this calamity phase.

Remember, each one of us has a responsibility towards self, family, community at large, and country during this pandemic outbreak.

Stay prepared, safe, healthy, and happy

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