

## ANXIETY AND COVID

Bushfires, COVID and restrictions – what a year it's been so far! Is it any wonder that many people are on edge? What can we do to help ourselves?

### What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a feeling of unease or nervousness about something with an uncertain outcome. Anxiety has three aspects. The first is emotional – feeling afraid or overwhelmed. The second is physiological changes: increased heart rate and blood pressure, digestive issues, insomnia. These are caused the release of adrenalin. The third aspect of anxiety is cognitive – negative thoughts such as telling yourself you can't cope. These negative thoughts are also known as worry.
- Anxiety that goes on for an extended period may lead to depression which is a feeling of despondency or dejection.

### Why is COVID Increasing People's Anxiety?

- The obvious reason is because people don't want to catch it – especially if their elderly, have a chronic illness or other risk factors that make them more likely to have a severe COVID illness.
- A range of other factors related to COVID that have raised anxiety levels: job loss, business closures, financial pressures, changed routines such as working from home or home schooling.
- Loss of face to face contact with others due to restrictions has also raised anxiety levels – many people haven't seen friends, families or even work colleagues since March.

### What can We do to Manage Anxiety?

- Avoid watching and reading too much news – stay on top of the facts but don't wallow in it.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle – eat a balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, don't drink too much caffeine or alcohol or take illicit drugs and get plenty of sleep.
- Exercise is important – movement, even just a short walk each day, helps to burn off some of that adrenalin. Maybe try finding at least on walk you haven't done each week – you may discover some wonderful places! Or check out the internet for free yoga or gym classes.
- Relaxation helps to calm your mind, release muscle tension and regulate your breathing. Consider mediation, stretch classes or one of the many relaxation CDs, DVDs, podcasts or apps available. Relaxation can also include sitting quietly listening to music, reading or taking a bath.
- Connect with other people – meet a friend for a walk, have a family barbecue, play a game of backyard cricket or turn off the television and play a board game with the family.
- Make something – a cake, a facemask or maybe a card to send to a relative you haven't been able to see because of lockdown restrictions.
- Plant a vegetable garden – this gets you out in the sun, gives you some exercise and you get rewarded with fresh veggies over the summer!
- Remember happy times – create a photo album of happy memories and particularly include pictures of people you can't currently see. Maybe make a second album to give them!
- Do something you find pleasurable – every day! This can distract us from our worries and remind us life can be fun too! Keep a diary of what you enjoyed each day so you can look back on it.
- Do "ordinary" things like go for a drive to Creswick, visit a farmer's market, meet a friend for coffee, have a picnic.
- Acupuncture and massage are also great for anxiety.

### What if this Doesn't help?

- If anxiety is interfering in your daily life despite trying these things see a doctor – you may need a referral to a counsellor or medication to help manage your anxiety.