



Alberta Health  
Services

# TAKING CHARGE OF WHAT YOU CAN: A COVID-19 TOOLKIT

Developed by the Community Addiction and Mental  
Health Clinic- Northeast

ADDICTIONS & MENTAL HEALTH  
CALGARY ZONE

Date Issued:  
06/15/2020

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## A World in Crisis

The Covid-19 epidemic has drastically changed the way we live, work, and connect each other in a very short period of time. As a world, we are experiencing a collective crisis, the likes of which most of us have never encountered. Right now it is NORMAL to be experiencing a whole host of emotions, including anxiety, anger, sadness, and uncertainty. Our minds and our bodies are closely connected, so it is also likely that you are losing sleep and experiencing other physical symptoms, such as muscle tension, aches and pains, headaches, and low energy.

### WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!

On one hand, this means that everyone in the world is going through a really awful time. That sucks! But this also means that we will *get through this together*, by collaborating, connecting, and supporting one another. Humans are really good at overcoming adversity.

### How Will This Toolkit Help?

We all need to find a sense of control right now. This toolkit is designed to help you focus on the parts of your life that you can take charge of and stop spending energy on the things you cannot control.

### The Anxiety Onion

You can think of anxiety as an onion. The Covid-19 crisis is anxiety provoking in itself. It's normal to feel anxious and you *should* be feeling anxious because this is our body's way of signaling to you that there is danger and that you need to keep yourself (and others) safe. This core "nugget" of the onion represents this anxiety.



**THE SITUATION  
(COVID-19)**

Extra layers of anxiety get added to the onion when you are thinking and behaving in unhelpful ways. Lack of routine, isolation, checking behaviours, over-exposure to the media, and unhelpful worry or rumination add extra layers to your anxiety onion.

Instead of **this anxious**



You feel **THIS anxious.**



Using this toolkit, you will learn how to “peel away the layers” of your anxiety onion by using the following strategies:

- **Building a healthy routine**
- **Limiting checking/reassurance seeking and media use**
- **Learning to manage your worries**

You will also learn some additional skills for managing your anxiety:

- **Mindfulness**
- **Other coping skills (including relaxation strategies)**

At the end of the toolkit, you will find some additional resources, including:

- information about **mental health programs and resources**, including crisis resources
- **Other tips for coping**
- **Financial resources**

## BUILDING A HEALTHY ROUTINE

For most of us, our routines have changed drastically. You may not be working right now or working from home, you may be tackling keeping your children occupied, or you may be adjusting to being around your partner for the majority of the day.

Work is an important source of structure, accomplishment, purpose, and social contact. For those who have experienced a job loss or change, you have also experienced a loss in all of the above areas.

Because of mental health struggles, others may have been social distancing before social distancing became a thing! You may be thinking to yourself, “I’ve got this! I’m an expert at self-isolating!” While this may be true, we would encourage you to take this crisis as an opportunity to develop a new healthy routine and to find creative ways to connect with others. This will set you up well for the next steps in your wellness journey, once we are able to more freely leave our homes.

### What are the components of a healthy routine?

Try to aim to complete each of these activities every day. Be gentle with yourself and realistic!

- A regular sleep schedule
- A social activity
- A physical activity
- A self-care activity
- A productive activity
- A pleasurable activity

These activities don’t necessarily need to be really involved or time consuming. Try to strike a balance between pushing yourself and not being too easy on yourself.

## TAKE CHARGE: **Build Your Routine**

1. Print out a copy of the blank *Routine Builder* and the *Routine Checklist*.
2. Using the blank *Routine Builder* sheet, brainstorm ideas for activities that could be part of your routine. We have provided you with some ideas to get you started.
3. Use the Routine Checklist to track your daily progress. Choose a wake-up and bed time that you will try to stick to. When you complete an activity, write it in the appropriate box. Aim to do at least one activity in each area per day.
4. At the bottom of the *Routine Checklist*, there is some space to set some “mini-goals” for yourself for the week. For example, you may set the goal to make your bed, get dressed, and eat breakfast every morning. Or you may set the goal of going for a 15 minute walk each day.
5. Start a new *Routine Checklist* for the next week on Sunday night by filling out your planned wake-up and bed times for the upcoming week and setting some new mini-goals for yourself.



Social

## ROUTINE BUILDER

Productive

Brainstorm ideas for  
activities that will be part of  
your new daily routine.

You might need to think  
outside the box.  
Use your creativity!

Physical

Self-Care

Pleasurable

## Social

Spend time with friends/family using a video chat program (e.g. Zoom, Skype). Try:

- A coffee chat
- Eating a meal together
- Board games or video games
- Cook together (share a recipe)
- A book club

Call or text a friend or family member

Virtually watch TV or a movie with someone (e.g., using Netflix Party extension)

Help someone in need

Hang an inspirational banner or sign outside your house for your neighbours to see

# ROUTINE BUILDER

Here are some ideas to get you started.

### TIPS:

- You can also brainstorm ideas with people in your life or with your therapist
- Please maintain a 2 m distance from others while doing activities outside the home!

## Productive

Pick a project (e.g., re-arranging your furniture, fixing something, home improvement)

Organize a closet, your clothing, a bookshelf

Daily household chores

Cook a meal, bake something, canning

Sign up for an online class

Grocery shopping

Shoveling

Getting your balcony/yard ready for spring

Clean out your car

Spring cleaning

Clean out your fridge

Pay bills, do paperwork

## Physical

Go for a walk

Try an online yoga, tai chi, or fitness video

Physical video games (e.g., Wii Fit, Just Dance)

Lift weights

Stretch or roll out your muscles

Doing a household chore that is physical (e.g., vacuuming, gardening, cleaning the car)

Going for a bike ride

Sit-ups or push-ups

Walking/running up indoor or outdoor stairs

Online dance classes or a dance party

Ride your bike

Use home exercise equipment

Play with your kids

## Self-Care

Sit outside in nature

Journal

Meditation or mindfulness

Do your nails or put on a face mask

Have a bubble bath

Eat a healthy meal

Focus on hygiene (e.g., regular showers, brushing your teeth, flossing, doing your hair, moisturizing your skin)

Practice a coping or relaxation skill

Write a list of things you like about yourself

Post inspirational quotes or affirmations around your house

## Pleasurable

Board games or puzzles

Video games

Play an instrument or learn how to play one online

Art or craft projects (e.g., painting, drawing, make gifts, jewelry making, model painting, origami)

Colouring

Listen to music or make a playlist

Watch a TV show or movie

Online virtual tours of museums

Make a photobook

Read a book or look through magazines

Build something

Explore the online resources through the Calgary Public Library

**YOUR ROUTINE** for the week of: \_\_\_\_\_

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
<b>Stuck to planned wake up time of</b> _____ am							
<b>Productive Activities</b>							
<b>Pleasurable Activities</b>							
<b>Self-Care Activities</b>							
<b>Social Activities</b>							
<b>Physical Activities</b>							
<b>Stuck to planned bed time of</b> _____ pm							

**MINI GOALS** for the week:

## BEHAVIOURS THAT FEED ANXIETY

When we start to experience a lot of worry and feel anxious, we can sometimes fall into some problematic behaviours. These behaviors can give us a sense of control and relief in the short-term; however, over the long run, they feed our anxiety.

### Checking and Reassurance Seeking

Unhelpful behaviours often take the form of either **checking** behaviours or **reassurance-seeking** behaviours. Look through the following list and check off any behaviours you are currently engaging in excessively and repetitively:

- Monitoring health symptoms multiple times a day (e.g., taking temperature; scanning body for unusual symptoms)
- Repetitively asking friends, family, healthcare providers about your health symptoms (asking for the same information from a number of people)
- Calling family and/or friends multiple times a day to check about their health and well-being
- Checking banking/finances/pension funds multiple times a day
- Excessively researching health symptoms/covid-19 symptoms online
- Excessively engaging in online forums discussing health symptoms or financial concerns
- Reading as many covid-19 articles as possible throughout the day
- Excessively analyzing of covid-19 data and numbers and trying to predict trends
- Other checking or reassurance-seeking behaviors:

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**TAKE CHARGE: Review the boxes you checked above. In the space below, reflect on any negative effects or consequences of your excessive checking and/or reassurance-seeking.**

Questions to consider: Is the anxiety relief short-lived? Does it lead to new worries or concerns? Does it negatively impact relationships?

Checking and reassurance-seeking behaviors aren't entirely bad – we don't want to be ostriches with our heads in the sand! We want to be aware of what is happening with our health, with our finances, and with the world around us. Ideally, we want to aim for a happy middle-ground between complete avoidance and excessive and time-consuming checking and reassurance-seeking.

In order to achieve this middle-ground, the goal is usually to decrease the behaviour (although sometimes completely eliminating the behaviour is necessary).

### **TAKE CHARGE: Reducing Checking and Reassurance Seeking**

Choose one of checking or reassurance-seeking behaviors you checked above and consider how you might be able to decrease this behavior over the next week. What would be a reasonable target for you in terms of time allotted to this activity?

*Behaviour:*

*Current time spent on behavior (or amount of times per day):*

*New goal for behavior (time spent and/or amount of times per day):*

## Media Use

The world we live in is interconnected. Technology provides us with unprecedented ways for connecting with one another, keeping up-to-date on the latest news stories, and keeping ourselves informed about the spread of Covid-19. On a positive note, having quick, easy access to each other and to the information we need has the potential to help us through this pandemic. However, looking up the news can be a form of checking and reassurance seeking. While this gives you temporary relief, in the long term it can feed stress and anxiety.

### BALANCE IS KEY!

It is important that you find a balance between getting the information you need and not freaking yourself out! Information should be **useful** and **empowering**. Below are some tips that will help you make decisions about your media use.

## Tips for Healthy Media Use

- **Consider your sources!** Think critically about the things you read and hear. Only use trusted, reputable sources. If watching the news has been too stressful for you, try sticking to website updates from sources like the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/) (https://www.who.int/), [Health Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html) (https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html) and [Alberta Health Services](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx) (https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx)
- **Set limits with yourself** about your media use.
  - You may set a time limit for yourself (e.g., I will only watch a maximum of 1 hour per day) or stick to just checking the news once or twice. It's a good idea to avoid keeping the news on in the background all day.
  - You could also limit which news sources you will use (e.g., I will watch Dr. Hinshaw's daily updates but I will not read any articles that people post on Facebook).
  - You could limit when you watch or read the news (e.g., I will avoid watching the news before bed because this will disrupt my sleep)

- **Take a break from social media.** If a certain form of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) has been unhelpful, consider taking a break from this platform. Likewise, if certain social media friends have had a negative impact on you, consider blocking them or muting their feeds for a while.
- **Consider whether certain social media could have a positive impact on you.** Certain forms of social media have been focused on positivity (e.g., goodnews\_movement on Instagram). Other media use that is unrelated to Covid-19 could be a helpful distraction (e.g., cooking/recipe accounts, art accounts).
- **Consider what you share on social media.** Are you sharing something that is coming from a reputable source? Could you balance sharing negative news with sharing positive news? Could you post something that's not related to Covid-19 at all?
- **Consider whether social media is adding unnecessary drama to your life.** If you are already experiencing anxiety, getting into debates and arguments may be a waste of your emotional energy. Watch out for trolls who are looking to start a fight.

### TAKE CHARGE: Media Use Plan

Based on the tips suggested above, what changes will you make to your media use right now?



## MANAGING YOUR WORRIES

It is normal to worry about a global pandemic. In fact, it would be kind of weird if you weren't worrying! However, worries can also become a "runaway train," contributing to more anxiety and stress than is necessary. Excessive *ruminatio*n (meaning reviewing the same worries over and over again, like on a "hamster wheel") is going to make your anxiety much worse. An important first step is learning the difference between helpful and unhelpful worry.

### Helpful vs. Unhelpful Worry

Worries are **HELPFUL** when:

- You are worried about something that is a real problem
- You have control over the thing you're worrying about
- It motivates you to do something to solve a problem
- You CAN do something about it, and you can do it NOW

EXAMPLES: *worrying about being around big crowds of people when the government has recommended social distancing; worrying about your teenager not respecting social distancing guidelines*

Worries are **UNHELPFUL** when:

- You are worried about something that is not totally based on facts
- You have no control or responsibility about the thing you're worrying about
- You can do something about it, but NOT NOW

EXAMPLES: *worrying about what will happen if you lose your job when there is no indication that you will lose your job; worrying about strangers not respecting social distancing guidelines*

## TAKE CHARGE: Dealing with worries

When you notice yourself worrying, work through the following steps.

*Writing down* your answers to the following questions is recommended:

1. What are your worries? (write down specific things you are saying to yourself)
2. Pick one worry that you wrote down. Is this worry helpful or unhelpful?
3. For **helpful** worries: **DO SOMETHING!** Come up with a step-by-step plan of how you will solve the problem. What is your plan?

For **unhelpful** worries: **USE A SKILL** to manage your anxiety, including distraction (see *Build a Routine* chapter), mindfulness (see *Mindfulness* chapter), or relaxation (see *Relaxation* chapter). What skill could you use right now instead of focusing on your worry?

## Coping Self-Talk

Covid-19 pandemic is an extreme situation and it is normal and even adaptive to worry about it. However, *what* you say to yourself and *the way* you say this to yourself matters! You may underestimate your ability to cope with tough times. You are probably more resilient than you think you are! Reminding yourself of this fact is essential.

### TAKE CHARGE: Coping statements

1. Write down a list of statements that remind you that you can handle whatever comes your way.
2. It might help to make these statements visible (e.g., putting them on post-its, a poster, a white board, or a mirror). You could also write these statements on an index card that you carry in your wallet or keep it in a notes app on your phone. That way, you can pull it out and look at it when needed.
3. Try to read over the coping statements you come up with *at least once per day, plus any time you are distressed*.

#### Examples of **COPING STATEMENTS**:

*It will be okay*

*You are strong*

*You've got this!*

*This won't be forever.*

*Together we can do this*

*Take things one day at a time*

*Focus on what you can control*

*This is an adjustment period- you'll get used to it over time*

*You've coped with tough things before, you can do it again*

*Just focus on what you need to do today, tomorrow, this week*

## Quiet Down Your Inner Critic

Do you tend to be self-critical on the best of days? If so, then you can expect that you will be *even more* critical right now! Examples of self-critical thoughts are below. Check off the thoughts you can relate to, or add your own.

- What's wrong with me? I should be learning a new skill or doing more around the house.
- Other people I know seem to be handling this way better than I am.
- I'm a bad mom. I'm horrible at this home schooling thing!
- I'm so lazy.
- I've gained weight and I feel disgusting. I've really lost control here.
- Other self-critical thoughts:

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Unfortunately, our old, unhelpful patterns tend to flare up during times of stress. On top of that, you may pressure yourself to pick up a new hobby, learn a new skill, and stay uber-productive during this physical distancing period. Social media makes this pressure worse! It is important to remember that everyone handles stress differently. Operating at 100% is unrealistic right now.

The problem with listening to your "Inner Critic" is that you feel bad about yourself and unmotivated. Why feel worse than you need to? You can quiet down your Inner Critic through ***self-compassion***.

What is self-compassion?

- **Kindness** towards yourself, rather than judging yourself.
- Giving yourself permission to be **human and imperfect**.
- Having **empathy** for yourself. Recognizing your good reasons for your actions, thoughts, and feelings.

**Examples of SELF-COMPASSIONATE STATEMENTS:**

You are a good person.  
Good enough is good enough!  
Just like everyone else, you're trying to survive.  
It would be weird if you WEREN'T feeling anxious!  
It's normal and understandable to be struggling right now.  
It's okay that you're finding this hard. You're trying your best!  
This is not normal life- why would you be operating at 100% right now?

**TAKE CHARGE: Self-Compassion**

1. **Become more aware of self-critical thoughts.** Imagine your self-criticism as an "Inner Critic". He/she is kind of a jerk! Try to notice when the Critic is talking. What is he/she saying?
2. **Understand the impact of self-critical thoughts.** When you listen to the Critic, how does this make you feel? Does he/she make things worse for you?
3. **Quiet down the critic.** Here are some handy tips for practicing self-compassion:
  - Imagine you are speaking to someone you love, maybe a friend, partner, or one of your children. What would you say to him/her if he/she had the same thought?
  - When you were younger, did you ever have a really good coach or teacher? What would this good coach or teacher say to you right now?

\*TIP: being self-compassionate to yourself doesn't mean that you're overly easy on yourself. It means that you balance kindness with having reasonable expectations for yourself, based on what you can handle right now.

## Another Resource

There are many other ways to work on your worries. If you would like to learn some more in-depth strategies for working on your worries related to the pandemic, you can try using the resource below.

**TAKE CHARGE: Download the “*Living with Worry and Anxiety Amidst Global Uncertainty*” guide on the Psychology Tools website**

1. Find the guide [HERE](https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/) or <https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/> (alternatively, you can Google the above title and “Psychology Tools”).
2. Read the guide. Consider printing it out and highlighting sections that you can relate to.
3. As suggested in the guide, try the following strategies: worry postponement, worry time, and thought records.

## MINDFULNESS

### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is another approach for managing your worries. Mindfulness is about being in the present moment, with acceptance and without judgment. We are often distracted by regrets of the past or future worries and it can be hard to spend time in the here and now. Mindfulness is a form self-awareness training that helps us approach our thoughts, feelings, sensations and environment with an attitude of curiosity and an understanding that they are temporary. This helps us to become an observer of ourselves and respond with compassion and kindness while we let thoughts and feelings come and go.

### How can it help?

Mindfulness has benefits for many people which include reduction of stress and anxiety, decreased ruminations (going over and over something in your head), less emotional reactivity, improved focus, more flexibility in our thinking and greater satisfaction in relationships (apa.org). **In the current time of crisis, high stress and uncertainty, mindfulness will not change events around us but can help with our perception of stress. It can be a useful tool to manage fearful and uncertain thoughts and feelings, as well as recognize that we are all in this together.** Daily practice can help make the positive outcomes of mindfulness long lasting through actual changes in the brain.

## TAKE CHARGE: Download the *Mindfulness Exercises* worksheet from the Therapist Aid website

(from [www.TherapistAid.com](http://www.TherapistAid.com))

1. Find the guide [HERE](#) or <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/mindfulness-exercises.pdf> (alternatively, you can Google “Mindfulness Exercises” and “Therapist Aid”).
2. Try at least one exercise each day. Make sure you try each exercise at least twice so you can see which one(s) you like best.
3. In the space below, track which mindfulness exercises you have tried so far and when it might be helpful to use them.

Date	Which exercise did you try?	When could you use this exercise in the future? Examples: when I first wake up, to help me fall asleep, when I'm annoyed with my kids/partner, when I hear a triggering story on the news



## Loving Kindness Meditation

There are many forms of meditation - a gentle one to start with is one that evokes a very natural state in us: gentle kindness for the self and others.

Loving-kindness meditation focuses on developing feelings of goodwill, kindness and warmth towards ourselves and others, which could be particularly helpful during our challenging times.

### TAKE CHARGE: Try using this Loving Kindness script

Although we often use words when we are learning loving-kindness meditation, the words are only secondary props. The focus of the meditation is on a feeling, a feeling of loving-kindness. Over time the words can fade and you simply are left with the feeling. That is the aim.

You may consider recording this script for yourself onto your phone. Then you can practice Loving Kindness by listening to the script whenever you think it might be helpful.

#### **1. SIT QUIETLY AND COMFORTABLY.**

Sit in a comfortable way but without being in a sleepy position.

For example, sit with your back straight, head up, feet on the floor and your arms gently in your lap.

Simply sit and notice yourself sitting.

Breathe naturally.

Watch your breath going in and your breath going out. Keep focusing on your breathing for a while.

*(continued on next page)*

## **2. PLACE YOUR ATTENTION ON THE AREA AROUND YOUR HEART.**

Place your attention on the area in the middle of your chest, around your heart.

Repeat to yourself gently and softly, feeling the resonance of the words: "Love, love, love, may my heart be filled with love..."

As you say this, if you like, bring to mind something that you feel caring and loving towards.

It may be an image of a soft, lovable dog, or the serene look on someone's face, or a baby, or the feeling of the soft fur as you stroke a kitten ...

This image is simply to help you kick-start the feelings.

If a feeling of loving-kindness arises without the need of these images there is no need for the images.

## **3. EXPERIENCE FEELING LOVE THROUGH YOUR WHOLE BODY.**

Experience this feeling of warmth and love through your whole body.

Feel the sense of caring, healing and soothing. Let it wash over you and through you while you gently repeat silently to yourself:

- May I be well, healthy and strong.
- May I be happy.
- May I abide in peace.
- May I feel safe and secure.
- May I feel loved and cared for.

Sometimes people find this stage difficult to do. It may be helpful to spend some days or weeks simply cultivating loving-kindness for yourself.

There is no need to rush on. The number of people you send the feeling of loving-kindness to is not what is important, it is developing the quality of the feeling that matters.

*(continued on next page)*

#### **4. BRING INTO YOUR MIND SOMEONE YOU LIKE A LOT AND RESPECT.**

Bring into your mind someone you like a lot and respect.

Send them these feelings of warmth and caring, as you wish them well:

- May you be well.
- May you be happy.
- May you abide in peace.
- May you feel safe and secure.
- May you feel loved and cared for.

If you have a feeling of loving-kindness you may not need the words.

If the words are too many for you, simply say, "May you be happy" is also fine.

#### **5. BRING TO MIND SOMEONE ELSE YOU LIKE AND RESPECT.**

Do this with someone else who is equally important, that you like and respect. Choose someone that you find it very easy to spread loving-kindness to.

Send them these feelings of warmth and caring, as you wish them well:

May you be well.

May you be happy.

May you abide in peace.

May you feel safe and secure.

May you feel loved and cared for.

- See more on [this website](https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/mindfulness-exercises.pdf): <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/mindfulness-exercises.pdf>

## Mindfulness Book Recommendations:

*Calming Your Anxious Mind* by Jeffrey Brantley

*Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* by John Kabat-Zinn

*Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg

*Spontaneous Happiness* by Dr. Andrew Weil

*Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World* by Dr. Danny Penman and Mark Williams.

**Additionally, a list of ‘The Top Mindfulness Books of 2019 ‘ is found at [Mindful.org](http://Mindful.org)**

## Mindfulness Websites:

[www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org) – Excellent resource with articles, guided meditations and practices

<https://blog.calm.com/mindfulness-resources> - Monthly mindful calendars with daily tips and exercises

[www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com) – Offering free meditations during the current crisis

## Free/Low Cost Mindfulness Phone/Tablet Apps to try:

**(may require you to sign up, but should offer some free content)**

The Mindfulness App

Calm – currently offering more free content during the crisis

Stop, Breathe & Think

Smiling Mind

Headspace

Insight Timer

10% Happier

Buddhify

## OTHER COPING SKILLS

In addition to mindfulness skills, there are a wide range of other coping skills that you might find useful for bringing your stress and anxiety levels down. Give some of these a try!

### Relaxation Skills

When we are experiencing stress and anxiety, the sympathetic nervous system is activated, meaning that the fight, flight, or freeze response is happening. Your brain is telling your body that you need to get into survival mode, and this means that you are experiencing a series of physiological changes that are designed to help you stay safe (e.g., you get a shot of adrenaline to help you fight or run away, your heart beats faster and you breathe faster to get more oxygen to your muscles, your muscles tense up to prepare for a fight).

The part of the brain activated during the fight, flight, or freeze response is primitive and bypasses the logical part of your brain, so even *thinking about* a dangerous situation can activate these body symptoms. Relaxation skills are designed to reverse the fight, flight, or freeze response in your body, so you will feel calmer after using them.

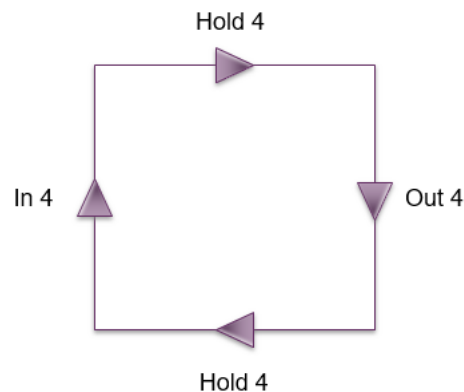
### **TAKE CHARGE: Try these relaxation skills!**

#### **Belly Breathing**

Put your hand on your belly and imagine it is a balloon. When you breathe in, the balloon should inflate (pushes your hand out). When you breathe out, the balloon deflates (your hand goes in). Try slowing down your breathing. Whenever you feel anxious, do a few rounds of belly breathing.

### Square Breathing

Take belly breathing one step further by pausing in between the in-breath and the out-breath. This will help you slow down your breathing even more. Try breathing in for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, out for 4 counts, and hold for four counts. Repeat as many times as you like. You can imagine this like a square:



### Grounding

Grounding is a strategy for bringing your attention to the outside world, away from your inner world of negative feelings and thoughts. When grounding, try saying these things out loud to yourself:

- List many things as you can see in the room
- List many colours as you can see in the room
- 54321
  - 5 things you can SEE
  - 4 things you can TOUCH
  - 3 things you can HEAR
  - 2 things you can SMELL
  - 1 thing you can TASTE

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**

We hold stress in our bodies in the form of muscle tension. PMR involves systematically tensing and releasing different muscle groups in your body. Written and audio scripts can be found online with a Google search. You can listen to many PMR scripts on You Tube.

**Free/Low Cost Relaxation Apps to try:**

Breathe2Relax

BreatheEasyFree

Mindshift

Thrive: Mental Wellbeing

Calm – currently offering more free content during the crisis

Stop, Breathe & Think

Buddhify

**A Strategy for Managing *Extreme Distress***

In times of crisis, we may find ourselves experiencing periods of extreme distress. The following skills are designed to help reduce distress quickly, at times when our usual coping strategies are ineffective, by altering our body chemistry. These skills are designed to create relatively rapid changes to your body. For example, using cold water on your face may rapidly decrease your heartrate, whereas intense exercise will temporarily increase your heartrate.

*NOTE: Please do not use this strategy if you have an underlying health condition that would be affected by rapid changes to your heart rate.*

## TAKE CHARGE: TIPP Skills

Try the following strategies when you are experiencing *extreme distress*. These strategies will act as a quick and effective emotional “re-set.”

### **T- Temperature** - *Change your body temperature*

Take a deep breath in, hold your breath, and submerge your face in a bowl or sink of cold water. Hold your breath for up to 30 seconds (no longer than you can comfortably and safely hold your breath for).

As an alternative, you can put an ice pack on your face, on the area around the top of your eyes and the tops of your cheek bones/bottom of your eyes.

It can also be helpful to hold an ice cube in your hand and/or rub it on your face. Doing so activates a “dive response” by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. This response tells our heart to rapidly slow down.

### **I- Intense Exercise** – *Engage in intense exercise for a short period of time*

Try several jumping jacks, jumping up and down, lifting weights (if accessible), or going for a run or very brisk walk (if safe to do so).

This can help reduce the urge to “do” something at times of great distress, as our urges at these times are not always effective or practical.

### **P – Paced Breathing** – *Slow down and deepen your breathing*

Breathe in slowly through your nose (counting can help with consistency of our breaths)

Breathe deeply- you should notice your belly extending outwards

Breathe out more slowly than your breathe in (e.g., If you count to 5 to breathe in, count to 7 to breathe out)

### **P- Paired Muscle Relaxation** – *Release tension in your body*

While breathing in, tense all your body muscles. Upon exhale, relax all your muscles, noticing the tension leaving your body.



## MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

### **Calgary Distress Centre**

24 hour crisis line: 403-266-4357 (HELP). Also offers online chat. For more information click [HERE](#) or <https://www.distresscentre.com/>.

### **Alberta Mental Health Helpline**

24 hour provincial helpline for any mental health concerns: 1-877-303-2642

### **Alberta Addiction Helpline**

24 hour provincial helpline for any addiction concerns: 1-866-332-2322

### **Eastside Family Centre (Wood's Homes)**

Currently offering e-therapy and phone therapy. For more information click [HERE](#) or <https://www.woodshomes.ca/programs/eastside-family-centre/>.

### **Crisis Response Team (Wood's Homes)**

Offering children and families crisis support. Call 403-299-9699 (24 hour) or text 587-315-5000 (9 am to 10 pm). For more information click [HERE](#) or <https://www.woodshomes.ca/programs/community-resource-team/>.

### **Text4Hope**

A new, free AHS program. After signing up, you will receive daily text messages written by mental health therapists with ideas for coping with Covid-19. For more information click [HERE](#) or <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17019.aspx> or text COVID19HOPE to 393939 to subscribe.

### **Mind Control: Managing Your Mental Health During Covid-19**

A free online course offered by the University of Toronto that covers how to manage anxiety during the pandemic. For more information click [HERE](#) or <https://www.coursera.org/learn/manage-health-covid-19>.

## APPENDIX: Other Resources

- **Practical and Emotional Preparedness for a Pandemic-** Mental Health Promotion and Illness Prevention, AHS. (Click [HERE](#) or <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpiip-disaster-pandemic-practical-and-emotional-preparedness.pdf>)
- **Covid-19 and Your Mental Health-** Mental Health Promotion and Illness Prevention, AHS) (Click [HERE](#) or <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpiip-disaster-pandemic-covid-19-and-your-mental-health.pdf>)
- **Mental Health: Coping and Connection for Children and Families During Covid-19-** Mental Health Promotion and Illness Prevention, AHS. (Click [HERE](#) or <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpiip-disaster-pandemic-coping-for-children-families.pdf>)
- **Managing Stress and Anxiety from Covid-19.** For free online course click [HERE](#) or <https://info.starlingminds.com/covid19-free-mental-health>
- **Mental Health Resources: During Covid-19** (Attached- Addiction and Mental Health, AHS)
- **Financial Assistance during Covid-19** (Attached- list of relevant government web links)



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Healthy Communities.  
**Together.**



## Mental Health Resources: During COVID-19

Mental health information during crisis is important. Alberta Health Services has information and a number of resources available for Albertans and our staff to help.

Mental health resources are posted here, [www.ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes](http://www.ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes).

### COVID-19 Online Resources

For helpful advice on handling stressful situations and ways to talk to children.

- [Coping and Connection for Children & Families During COVID-19](#) (AHS)
- [COVID-19 and Your Mental Health](#) (AHS)
- [Practical and Emotional Preparedness for a Pandemic](#) (AHS)
- [Mental health and coping with COVID-19](#) (CDC)
- [Talking with children about COVID-19](#) (CDC)
- [Talking with children during infectious disease outbreaks](#) (SAMHSA)

### Podcast

<https://soundcloud.com/ahs-communications/ahs-covid-19-podcast-dr-mitchell/s-uqRho?fbclid=IwAR1-cArxNiIzNFYdDYt3GBJIXpKS3R0jZwO20GL6FDocJFdSxpvHsMW1Jc>

### Need more?

Be sure to check regularly to the online information as resources will be updated and added as developed. Future podcasts and videos will also be shared in the coming days.

# Financial Assistance during COVID-19

Here are some websites that will provide you with updated information about financial assistance during Covid-19:

## **Government of Canada Website**

Information about benefits, credits, and financial support related to Covid-19  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/campaigns/covid-19-update/covid-19-benefits-credits-support-payments.html>

## **Government of Alberta Website**

\* **Scroll down to *Financial Support for Albertans* section**  
<https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

Information about rent payment plans in Alberta  
<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/COVID-19-rent-payment-plans.pdf>

## **City of Calgary Website**

Information about financial supports during Covid-19  
<https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/cema/Pages/COVID-19-Government-information.aspx>

Information about residential property tax relief  
<https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/cema/Pages/COVID-19-property-tax-relief-residential.aspx>

Information about low income support  
<https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/cema/Pages/COVID-19-Low-Income-Support.aspx>

Information about food resources  
<https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/cema/Pages/COVID-19-Access-to-food.aspx>

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(cover page, pgs. 1-2)