

Dealing with Anxiety

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Dear friends,

We would like to continue supporting you with new ideas and reflections.

We have observed that during these last two weeks (3-4th) of confinement many people reported in counselling having problems with mood, presenting low energy levels and lack of motivation that often lead to procrastination. Also, people have been reporting problems to sleep because of dealing with anxiety (high levels of physiological arousal and worrying) and the abuse of technology.

The following strategies, techniques, and resources are focused on dealing with emotions such anxiety, arousal, sadness and discomfort that can also help you sleep better. These strategies focus on self-regulation.

What is Anhedonia?

It is described as reduced motivation and inability to experience pleasure as before. Someone who are experiencing anhedonia, experience reduced motivation and anticipatory pleasure (**wanting**) and consummatory pleasure (**liking**). In this way, pleasurable activities or things such as eating a favorite meal or doing a favorite activity are not experienced with the same pleasurable strength.

Experiencing anhedonia is normal under the confinement circumstances. If you are worried that this is too long or too intense please get in touch with our counselling team for assessment and support.

What is Stress?

Stress is the process of appraising and responding to a threatening or challenging event. Stress is therefore subjective and it depends on your capacity to psychologically deal with the situation. The way you interpret the situation and your attitude clearly determine your level of stress and physiological arousal. Also, the way you act also determine your arousal and your perception of reality. For example, doing things fast and with low consciousness can lead to more stress (e.g. overeating, talk fast and loud, increasing your arousal, etc.)

Arousal is a general state of physiological activation that can go from deep sleep (low levels of arousal) to extreme excitement. It is neither positive nor negative. It refers to the physiological reaction. Your cognitive evaluation of your arousal is what determines your emotional reaction to it.

Strategies to Cope with Anhedonia, Anxiety and Worrying

Whenever we deal with anxiety, we need to focus on three different types of strategies as follows:

- 1) Dealing with unhealthy behaviours
- 2) Dealing with the physiological arousal;
- 3) Dealing with your thoughts

1. Dealing with Unhealthy Behaviors

Observe yourself and be mindful of your behaviors: When you are aware of your own conduct you may assess and find other coping strategies on your own.

Slow down: Walk, talk, eat...slowly. Whenever you do things, do them more slowly.

Challenge yourself with new healthy behaviors. Incorporate them into your daily routine.

Make a checklist of TO DO AND TO DON'T DO things daily with the only objective of keeping your mood stable and your anxiety under control. Activities such as physical exercise, meditation, lighting your candles, avoid overeating, etc. could help.

'Chaos is the best friend of anxiety'

The idea of this headline is simple; manage your environment and behaviors to manage your anxiety. And what does it mean to manage one's environment?

- Organize your space:

1. Make a clean sweep.
2. Toss, recycle or store.
3. Develop a filing system.
4. This applies to your digital space.
5. Tidy up at the end of each day.

This is a great time to go minimal (Check out the minimalist movement or to follow KonMari Guide) to tidy up and organized your stuff.

<https://www.wayforth.com/blog/ultimate-konmari-guide/>

We recommend you to reduce the amount of noise around you. You may do it as follows:

- 1) Turn off the TV or other electronic devices; or lower the volume
- 2) Turn off your cell phone: at least during dinner or conversations, or keep it in silence.
- 3) Get rid of all your alerts and notifications: we have many alerts on our phones, twitter, Instagram, Facebook, youtube... Are all of these alerts really necessary?
- 4) Schedule quiet time.

2. Dealing with High Physiological Arousal

One of the most useful and fast strategies to lower your arousal is using diaphragmatic breathing during high stress. Breathing properly is essential to control your brain from its unconscious autonomic system to deal with anxiety and arousal.

Instructions:

1- Get in a comfortable position (sit or lay down). You may want to use relaxing music as you practice your breathing. You may find the breathing rhythm and intensity that better works for you.

2- Inhale. Breathe slowly through your nose for 4-6 seconds.

3-Retain the air in your lungs for about 4 seconds.

4-Exhale slowly through your mouth (as if you are blowing through a straw) for 6-8 seconds. The main trick to feeling calm is here in slowing the exhalation.

5- Repeat the process about 2-3 more times.

Please check the following resources for practicing breathing techniques:

- Sama vritti pranayama/Equal breath:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGqzpEAYlHw>
- Nadi shodhana/alternate breathing nostril:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l11qFpRqhlQ>
- Humming bee breath:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfW68Tlvt8>
- Relax and energize breathing techniques
<https://www.yogajournal.com/yoga-101/inhale-exhale-relax-and-energize>
- breathing techniques
<https://www.healthline.com/health/breathing-exercises-for-anxiety>

*Related to the physiological arousal is the tension that accumulates in our muscles. If you are anxious, whether you notice it or not, you're probably walking around with muscle tension on your entire body. We store stress and anxiety in our muscles. Thus, systematically relaxing your muscles is key to release all of that tension.

Here's a great exercise to let go of all of that tension:

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR) EXERCISE

1. Lie down or sit at a quiet and comfortable place. Think that you need 15 mins for this exercise.
2. Close your eyes. Take a slow breath, count to 5 and exhale slowly. You could also incorporate the breathing exercise that you learned, at this point.
3. Put your feet flat against the floor and pay attention to either your right or left foot. Notice the tension in every part of your foot: toes, sides, ankle, etc. If you notice some thoughts coming your way or that your mind starts to wander, say hello to them, congratulate yourself for having noticed them and let them go to the cloud. It is a great practice to think that you are uploading them to the cloud or that they are made of chalk and while you let them go, they are wiped away.

4. Tense and curl your toes and tense your foot as tightly as possible for 5 secs. Focus only on this located tension. Notice how it feels.
5. Now slowly relax the area. Notice the relief from letting go of the tension. Feel the warm feeling in the area.
6. Repeat steps 3 to 5 x two more times and keep breathing.
7. Repeat steps 3 to 6 for the remaining areas of the body in order: Foot → Calves → Thighs → Buttocks → Stomach → Shoulders → Forearms → Hands → Lips and cheeks → Forehead.

The main benefit of PMR is that it allows you to experience what a relaxed muscle feels like, so you can later monitor your tension and stress levels.

You can download the *Deep Cam-Ambient Sounds to Help you Relax* or *Deep Relax-Your Best Companion for Stress Relief* apps to help with this exercise.

Please check the following video that guides you through progressive muscle relaxation.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihO02wUzgc>

3. Dealing with your thoughts

The way you think is very important. As we have discussed in our previous document (Dealing with Confinement) your thought process influences your physiological response to stress. A neutral and positive interpretation of the situation, an attitude of acceptance of things you can't control will help you focus your attention on the proper activities to make things better. A proper thinking process is very important for your autonomic nervous system to calm down and focus on the right activities to deal with the situation. We are going to give you basic steps in meditation and we will also include some resources for both guided meditation and yoga.

Here are some exercises that will help you change your perspective or cognitive appraisal:

LOOK FOR THE SILVER LINING

Lemons to Lemonade. There is a reason why these sayings are so popular and it is because they are based in truth. There is profound meaning in them. Try to look for the positives that are followed by these difficult times. This is something you can do:

Finding Positive Results During Times of Crisis:

1. List something bad that has happened to you.
2. List at least 3 positive things that resulted after your harsh experience.
3. Think of how did this experience positively impact your life. Did you become more compassionate, stronger, more aware, less fearful, more mindful...?

You do this thinking of the current situation.

ROLE REVERSAL

This exercise is fairly straightforward: Think of, what would you tell a friend who is having the same negative thoughts that you are having? What advice would you give him/her if they were in the same situation? You can also take the role of your counselor. This exercise will help you to provide clarity and to stimulate problem-solving from a different perspective, also to be more compassionate with yourself. Go ahead and give yourself some great advice!

WORRYING CONTROL TECHNIQUES

LET YOURSELF WORRY!

Yes, we want you to worry. The only thing is that you are only allowed to do it for max 20 mins per day, at the same time. The problem is not that you worry. We are all worried! The problem is spending all day long worrying, randomly worrying or not doing anything else than worrying. Let's put some structure in your worry patterns. So, create a designated worry time. But do not schedule it in the late afternoon or before going to sleep. If you find yourself worrying during the day you can write down with a word your worry, so you can make sure you worry about that later. This is an exercise of practice and patience, but that leads to a piece of mind. During your worry time, worry all you want, until your heart is contempt. If you run out of time write down your worry for your next day worry time and stop. If you don't need the full 20 mins, find something fun to do.

MEDITATION

Here we include some instructions to do basic exercises on meditation. We also included links to practice guided meditation on your own.

Go ahead! Put your mindfulness skills to work!

MINDFUL EATING

1. Find a comfortable place where you can eat your meal quietly.
2. Pay lots of attention to the food you are about to eat. First, observe what it looks like. What color is it? Is it on a plate, maybe in a bowl? Does it look hot or cold? Now, observe its smell. Does it smell fresh or burnt?
3. Take a bite. Observe how it tastes in your mouth. What flavor does it have? Is it sweet, salty..? How is the texture? Is it soft, maybe grainy? Notice the intensity of the flavor and how it fades after swallowing. Feel the movement of your jaw as you chew. Feel the food going down your system.
4. Repeat with each bite until you're finished.
5. Pay attention to your stomach now. Do you feel full? Lastly, pay attention to any remaining flavor in your mouth and your general sensation. For example, are you thirsty?

MINDFULNESS OF BEAUTY

1. Close your eyes and use the breathing technique explained above.
2. Now that you are relaxed imagine something that is beautiful to you. It could be anything, really: the face of your partner, your pet, a special place, a painting or flower, the sky, anything.
3. Once you have your 'object' in mind, focus on what it makes it beautiful for you. Is it its texture, color, smell, shape...? Or is it the warm feelings that elicit in you what makes it beautiful? Try to describe all of its features on your mind. Focus on this for 10 min.
4. Slowly open your eyes when you are finished and share your experience with someone. It can be over the phone. Describe all of it and be as detailed as possible. Notice the positive energy and emotions that arise on you when you talk about it. It is also a good idea to write about it.

Check out the following resources for yoga:

Yoga with Adriene: Yoga lessons addressed to deal with anxiety, anger and grounding practice.

- Yoga for anxiety and stress
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJbRpHZr_d0&list=PLui6Eyny-UzwmsJ9vILet4TJwqclNCz4j&index=4&t=0s
- Yoga for anger <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie5yjNGLxfQ&list=PLui6Eyny-UzwmsJ9vILet4TJwqclNCz4j&index=4>
- Yoga grounding practice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ74ZykbFFE&list=PLui6Eyny-UzwmsJ9vILet4TJwqclNCz4j&index=5>

Check out the following resources for dancing:

We have selected a few playlists but you can create your own:

- <https://www.mixcloud.com/josentido-salas/templo-del-baile-in-da-house/?fbclid=IwAR2WlbT1u35GvVlpXonJfH16xXFGcjt4Lkh2vnnT3N5OFwRwXnT6bmuhNSw>
- <https://www.mixcloud.com/alex-sevilla/templo-del-baile-march-2020-quarantine-especial-edition/>

Here are some Apps to deal with anxiety, stress and meditation:

- Headspace
<https://www.headspace.com/es>
- Insighttimer
<https://insighttimer.com/>

- Serenmind (In Spanish)
<https://serenmind.com/>

We hope you find some of these resources useful and help you out. Please keep counting on our team to talk, debrief and find other ways to cope.

Warm regards,

The Bionexum Counselling Team

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