



The Ontario Psychological Association offers tips on managing anxiety about H1N1 flu

The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about H1N1 flu can cause anyone to feel anxious and worried. These reactions are understandable because circumstances are rapidly evolving and knowledge of the illness is limited. Even during this period of uncertainty, you can take several steps to manage your anxiety and have a positive outlook. The Ontario Psychological Association has useful information and tips for coping:

Get the facts - gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as a federal, provincial or municipal public health agency. Gather information at regular intervals in order to help you distinguish fact from rumors. Be wary of unsubstantiated rumors, which can be upsetting and may deter you from taking appropriate action.

Keep things in perspective - government officials need to prepare for worst-case scenarios in order to protect the public. The public, however, does not need to expect the worst.

Maintain a hopeful outlook - public health agencies around the globe are working on identifying outbreaks of the illness and to ensure the availability of the best medical care to those who are sick. Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.

Stay healthy - a healthy lifestyle—including proper diet, exercise and rest—is your best defense against any disease threat. Adopting hygienic habits such as washing your hands regularly will also minimize your exposure to all types of germs and disease sources. A healthy body can have a positive impact on your thoughts and emotions, enabling you to make better decisions and deal with the flu's uncertainties.

Communicate with your children. Discuss the flu with honest and age- appropriate information. If your children have concerns, addressing these together may ease their anxiety and distress. Parents can also help allay distress by focusing children on routines and schedules that remain unchanged despite any changes due to flu preparations. Remember that children will observe adults behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during this time.

Build resilience - resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, threats or significant sources of stress. Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage life's adversities to help you manage your emotions during this challenging time.

Seek additional help - if you have intense feelings of anxiety or hopelessness or are having trouble performing your job or other daily activities, a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can help you develop an appropriate strategy for moving forward.

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