

Stress and Anxiety

What Is Stress?

Stress is a normal response to a demand for adaptation. In fact, stress is an integral part of life. It allows the body to adjust or adapt to a multitude of positive or negative events that anyone could experience, such as a birth, wedding, or job loss. Stress shows up as various physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions. The ability to adapt to new situations depends on the individual's personality, beliefs, past and current experiences, support network, and the like.

What Is Anxiety?

Unlike fear, which is a response to a real, specific threat, anxiety is a response to a vague or unknown threat. Anxiety occurs when an individual anticipates the occurrence of a dangerous or unfortunate event. Anxiety is a part of life, just like joy, sadness, and anger. As in the case of stress, anxiety can show up as various physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions. The degree and intensity of anxiety experienced varies from one person to the next. How an individual perceives the event can significantly affect the intensity of the anxiety experienced.



Influenza Pandemic: Source of Stress and Anxiety

The influenza pandemic is an unusual and unknown situation that calls on us to adjust and adapt since we have never had to deal with something similar. It brings out reactions and emotions in each of us. We anticipate its impacts on our lives and that of people close to us.

The possibility of experiencing stress or anxiety is quite normal should an influenza pandemic or any other unusual event—anticipated or not—occur. While we have no control over such things, we are able to preserve our well-being. This involves recognizing the reactions and factors that contribute to stress and anxiety, so that they can be coped with.

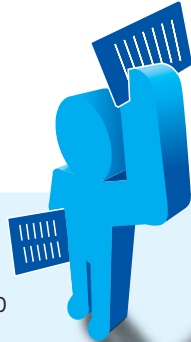
Signs of Stress and Anxiety

An individual experiencing stress or anxiety will have several of the following symptoms:

- Anticipating scenarios: «And what if...»
- Excessive worrying and insecurity
- Feelings of powerlessness in the face of situations that cannot be controlled
- Self-talk that does not always reflect reality
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tension, irritability, or lack of tolerance
- Headache, stomachache, and neck tension
- Problems with sleeping or appetite
- Fatigue and lack of energy

Ways to Improve the Situation

All of these symptoms of stress and anxiety are normal in the face of events such as a pandemic. Most people have resources and means for adjusting to such occurrences. Trust in your normal ways of coping with difficult situations. We can also suggest other ways that might be of help. For the most part, they are based on getting information, organizing your daily life, and seizing opportunities to take care of yourself.



Get Informed

Lack of information can lead to rumours and interpretations.

Get reliable information about the influenza pandemic. Such information is frequently published on the Government of Québec's pandemic Web site: <http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/news/news.shtml>.

Remember that the government was able to prepare for this influenza pandemic, unlike for those in the past.

Get Organized

- Find one or more individuals you can count on, should the need arise, to help out with things such as taking care of the children or a family member in need.
- Organize and plan your tasks based on immediate priorities.
- Keep your daily tasks to a minimum as much as possible. For example, vacuum twice a week instead of every day.
- Learn how to delegate and to accept help from others. For example, ask the children to do the dishes.
- Keep in touch with people who make you feel good.
- Get ideas from those around you to reconcile work and recreation.
- Remember winning strategies that you have used in the past to get through a difficult situation. Build on your resources and personal strengths.
- Breathe calmly and deeply.
- Give your beliefs a reality check.
- Listen to your self-talk and ask yourself if your fears are well founded. Check with someone you trust and who knows you well. Look for explanations that are more likely and that reassure you. Learn to live with a certain amount of uncertainty and the unknown. After all, that is how life is.



Take Care of Yourself

- Get involved in physical activities that relief tension, such as dance or walking.
- Practice good lifestyle habits such as eating well, getting enough sleep and rest, and avoiding alcohol and drugs.
- Take time to enjoy little things, such as a nice, relaxing bath or reading.

- Keep in touch with your feelings, emotions, and reactions. Allow yourself to express them, either to someone you trust or through writing or drawing.



Things Will Be Better If...

- You feel more relaxed.
- While you remained concerned about the health of the people you care about, your worrying is not overwhelming.
- Ways of resolving or improving the situation seem feasible.
- Your thoughts are more realistic.
- You can pay attention when reading or watching television.
- Your mood is more stable.
- You have less muscle tension.
- You sleep better and regain your appetite.
- You feel that you are getting your energy back and that you are not as tired.

Went to Seek Help

If you feel several of the following, your resources no longer enable you to manage your concerns on a daily basis. Beware of burnout! It can happen to anyone. Don't ignore these warning signs that may indicate you should seek professional help.

- You can't seem to figure out how to start the day off. Everything seems to be a mountain-like obstacle.
- You can't make even simple decisions; you have errors in judgment.
- You can't concentrate and are distracted.
- You are more impatient with your children. You have the impression you spend your day shouting; you are afraid of losing control.
- Just hearing somebody say the word pandemic makes you panic.
- You feel like you are suffocating. Your heart is galloping, you feel dizzy, and you are nauseous.
- You are constantly on the lookout for flu symptoms.
- You avoid everyone outside the home.
- You always feel on the verge of tears. You can't sleep. You have lost your appetite.
- You have recurrent thoughts that are intrusive and frighten you.
- You feel exhausted and at the end of your rope.

Mutual help and solidarity in any tragic event remain the prime attitudes for reestablishing individual and collective equilibrium.

Available Resources

Telephone

- Your local health and social services center
- Info-Santé: 8-1-1
- Services Québec toll-free line: 1-877-644-4545
- Tel-jeunes: 1-800-263-2266
- Ligne Parents: 1-800-361-5085
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Québec Chapter: 1-514-849-3291

The Internet

- Government of Québec's pandemic Web site: **www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/news/news.shtml**
- Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec's Web site: **www.msss.gouv.qc.ca**
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Québec Chapter's Web site: **www.acsm-ca.qc.ca/questionnaires**
- Tel-jeunes Web site: **www.teljeunes.com**

Read the other psychosocial information sheets dealing with various topics related to influenza pandemics. They can be downloaded from the Government of Québec's pandemic Web site.

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Checklist

If necessary, contact
