

Managing anxiety and fear

It is very understandable that many of you are expressing anxiety over the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Renal patients are duly concerned regarding this disease and the potential effects on those with health vulnerabilities. Family members are seeking confirmation that they are doing everything they can to effectively protect.

At times like this it is very normal to be searching for definite answers to what are often unfortunately unanswerable questions. Uncertainty and fear can challenge us and, if we allow it, be very destabilizing with negative effects on our mental health. If you are finding the news or posts on social media are making you feel more anxious, take a break from them and go back to them again later when you've been able to regain your focus on positive daily events.

Top tips...

It is difficult to stop anxiety in its tracks but the following can help you to regain control over what can become irrational thinking.

1) Recognise it is normal for fear to trigger our natural 'Fight or Flight' mode, which increases the adrenaline in our body and can lead to physical reactions such as:

- Palpitations
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath

2) Regain control by focusing on your breathing. The following is just one of the techniques you can use: Rest one hand on your chest and the other hand on your stomach. Breathing normally notice your chest and stomach moving under each hand. Now imagine you have a balloon under each hand. As you breathe in through your nose - focus on inflating the balloons equally (this may take a few attempts to get the technique right). Now move on to focusing on the 'balloons' deflating equally as you breathe out. Do this for however long feels comfortable and regain a sense of control.

3) If you are finding that anxiety is impacting on your sleep you could consider using an app to provide some calm time, mindfulness or music to help you rest. There are many apps available but do check as some might charge.

4) Talk to somebody. A member of your renal team who you connect with or a family member or friends who is calm and understanding. It can really help to share your worries. Do not allow yourself to become isolated with your concerns.

5) Practice mindfulness - If thoughts become overwhelming take a walk or engage in a practical activity. Make sure you focus on the physical task and keep in the moment.

6) Try allocating a specific time to worry so that it doesn't take over your day. Whenever a worry comes into your head – don't focus on it - just write it down and get on with your day. Read your notes during a set time period allocated by you. This will provide a controlled environment for you to consider what it is that is causing you to feel anxious, nervous or concerned and allow your mind to be free from intruding negative thoughts at other times.

Acknowledge that you are doing the very best you can to cope at this time – repeat this out loud (or in your head): 'I am doing the very best I can at this time' - in order to challenge and stop intrusive, negative thoughts. Most importantly, do not panic and follow the advice of your renal team.