

Is Corona a fear or anxiety? And how to cope with it?

Many people are currently being exposed to the term panic in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic -

But what is panic and what do we experience? Is it fear or anxiety and how is it related to panic?

Let's start with the difference between fear and anxiety:

What is fear?

Fear is an innate natural response of mammals accompanied by emotional sensation and physical reactions. Fear plays an important role in our survival as a mechanism to identify a state of danger to us or prevent us from entering into a dangerous state.

Fear serves as a means of removing us from the danger threatening our lives.

Fear automatically triggers three typical responses: assault or combat, escape or freeze.

These are known as the 3Fs: FIGHT, FLIGHT & FREEZE.

This mechanism is very archaic and its purpose is to save us. Therefore fear is one of the most important emotions, and those who have no fear will not survive because they do not have the mechanism to protect themselves.

Because it is an ancient mechanism, it was originally intended to help us escape the prey or dangerous animal or to physically attack a predator or an enemy. The physical response is:

Quick breaths - to absorb as much oxygen as possible.

Rapid Pulse - with the aim of accelerating the supply of oxygen and other substances throughout the body and especially to the muscles involved in the fight or flight action.

Sweating - to cool the surface of our bodies so they will not heat up to a dangerous level.

Visual field change - to be able to quickly identify visual information.

Contraction of the intestine and desire to go to the bathroom - to free ourselves of everything possible so that the body is "lighter" and needs to deal only with the survival: escape or assault.

But for most modern people, most of the events of fear are ones that do not present options of attack / combat or escape. In most stressful situations in our lives we are passive and therefore the reactions we experience are interpreted by us as negative, frightening predictors. Corona is exactly the case of no option to attack or escape.

This is where our interpretation comes in. "I sweat, I gasp, my pulse is racing and my muscles shaking and trembling. I so feel dizzy as if I'm about to faint or have a heart attack".

It should be emphasized that when a threat is detected and we interpret it as an impending danger, the survival mechanism starts automatically and works very fast "cutting off" the

logical and reflective apparatus of the brain [frontal part] to be able to act as soon as possible. That is, it is an automatic response to a state that is decoded by the brain as a dangerous situation. But as soon as the danger passes, the sense of fear also calms down, the emotional and cognitive physiological symptoms will be reduced, and we will soon return to our routine and engage in contemplating and thinking about what happened and what could have happened.

Freeze- well freeze is also a normal reaction and even a coping mode at times when your system needs to shut off. This reaction may be more frightening but be patient with it and reassure yourself that with slow normal breathing and slight movements of your arms and legs that will increase slowly, and then give yourself good shaking and it will be reduced. You may also just count from 120 down to zero by 7 points at a time: 120, 113, 106 etc.

So, the response to Corona is a reaction that comes from fear but that reaction can turn into an anxiety reaction and we will talk about it soon.

What can be done to reduce the immediate fear response given that there is no immediate danger?

The best behavior is to avoid passivity - do something! Preferably a simple action such as prepare something to drink, eat, or help others.

At the physical level, we will begin by calming the rapid oxygen collection mechanism (quick breaths) slowing down the breaths and moving to slow, deep breaths (exhaling) for a long time (say count to 7) and pacing the inhaling (say count 3). Preferably at least for 5 minutes.

Secondly, drink water, drinking water provides a signal to the body that there is enough fluid and no need to go "into an emergency fluid economy". Preferably lukewarm water with a little sugar and very little salt (trace). These two components also give a signal to the emergency system to reduce action.

Try to do simple arithmetic exercises: Composing and subtracting, multiplying and dividing the most basic actions.

Doing so requires us to activate the thinking part of the brain that in many cases neutralizes the fear (and anxiety) response.

You can count objects of a certain color and more, the main thing is to force the logical / realistic thinking system to return to work.

Activity: Jumping, cleaning, gymnastics - all of which release the "energy" sent to the muscles as a normal response to the threat but as we don't fight or flight we need to release this accumulated energy. So you may shake for a while or put some lively music on and dance to it.

At the end of the section we will offer some more ideas but let's move on to anxiety or panic attack.

When does the realistic fear of being infected by Corona turn into anxiety?

Especially when this fear fills your world and you can only think catastrophic and disturbing thoughts. And you are in a state of agitation.

Anxiety is a general fear or worry that dominates neutral situations and not necessarily a specific event or stimulus. It is manifested in a wide range of thinking / cognitive symptoms such as anxiety from the future, restlessness, uncertainty, physical stress, worrying and frightening thoughts that are not letting go, that you cannot be rid of and are accompanied by an acute sense of insecurity

This anxiety can take over the person whilst awake and disturb his sleep. As anxiety increases, dependency behaviors and attachment to others increases.

The hard thoughts are sometimes called catastrophic thoughts such as, "It will never end," "I will never get out of this", "I go crazy", which in turn increases the terrible feeling and worsens the feeling of anxiety.

Sometimes the thoughts themselves become the source of fear - a phenomenon called "the fear of fear".

Unfortunately, trying to avoid these thoughts usually causes them to increase. Because anxiety is not focused and mainly because those around the anxious person do not react to any stimuli that the person is experiencing. The accompanying thoughts can be me feel that I am crazy. Other aspects of anxiety are loss of appetite and sleep disturbances. Lack of sleep or sleep deprivation affects fatigue during the day, causes irritability, difficulties in concentration and memory impairment.

The most common response is avoidance. This is a mechanism that makes a lot of sense - if I'm afraid of a particular situation, I'd better avoid it. The problem is that avoidance usually spreads to more and more areas and gets worse without treatment. To the point of seclusion at home ...

The physiological reactions to an anxiety attack are similar to the acute stress response: chills, instability, uncontrollable tremors, accelerated heart rate, rapid breathing, various gastrointestinal disorders, nausea, hyperhidrosis, headaches, blurring, fainting and more.

It is important to emphasize, that the panic or anxiety attack usually passes within a few minutes, but the thoughts may persevere thus strengthening the dread of the difficult experience of losing control over one's body.

- **What can we do?**
- First, all of the recommendations written above on fear are appropriate here too, but we will add a few more:

(The recommendations below are from Mooli Lahad and Miki Doron's protocol SEE FAR CBT published by CSPC.)

From ongoing research and therapeutic experience, a number of effective ways to relieve stress and anxiety have been found. Below are the main ones. It should be emphasized that these methods are not the same for everyone. Each one of us can choose the right one for himself.

Exercise enables the conversion of psychological tension into vital and liberating physical energy.

- Walking alone or with others, running, dancing, - all are good and healthy ways to relieve stress.
- Yoga, relaxation, meditation, rhythmic breathing or any other way of diverting your attention from the stressor, to relax the body and mind, instead of what perpetuates anxiety and stress.

Dealing with anxiety through imagination:

- It is advisable to sit in a comfortable position, preferably with your eyes closed (although this is not mandatory).
- Take a few deep breaths and exhale slowly.
- You can choose from the following sections which are best for you:
- Imagine a pleasant experience you had and "enter" into it. Concentrate on the details of the experience and let yourself enjoy it. If the image helps you to relax and feel some pleasure, use it daily. If you did not feel any change, select another image.
- Concentrate on a person you know well and that you feel copes well with stress.

Imagine how he would cope with the pressure you are experiencing now and act like him.

- Remember a time where you coped well with stress in the past. What were you doing that helped you? Recall what it was that was helpful at the time and write down the successful coping methods you used.
 - Imagine that your stress level is a car's speedometer. When you are at your peak, the dial indicates 100. When you are relaxed, it indicates 0. Now imagine that you are controlling the fuel pedal. Start with pushing the pedal to maximum and then slowly release the pressure. Focus on the body's sensations, which figure the dial indicates. Try again, accelerate and take a deep breath and reduce pressure slightly from the

fuel pedal (it's important to imagine, including sitting down while driving and moving your leg muscles, as if the fuel pedal does exist). Try to reduce by five and then raise by five. Note the changes that occur in the dial mode. Gradually go down to zero and experience the change in your feeling. (Remember, you do not have to reach the "0" level but only aim for it. Any achievement in lowering the indicating level is important).

- **Coping with stress and anxiety through self-talk:**

Read the following statements and choose from them, which one, when you say it to yourself, help you feel better. Then memorize them out loud and use them when needed.

Take a deep breath and exhale while saying a soothing word like calm, peaceful, serene (or any other word that may calm you down) until you exhaled, completely and repeat this action several times.

Now choose the sentence:

- I will not let fear win, I can overcome.
- I will not be stressed only because I am under pressure. My feeling of stress is a natural reaction in stressful situations, and others experience the same sensations.
- The horrors that I imagine are unrealistic at the moment, better to think about real problems.
- I do not solve any problem by constantly dealing with difficult things that can happen.
- I gone through tougher pressures and was able to cope.
- This is the right time to use the techniques I learned to cope with stress

It is my choice and I choose to feel better

Coping with stress and anxiety through relaxation or exercise:

- Guidelines: Read the relaxation methods on the list, practice them, select the ones that help you most and use them when needed:
- Jump fifty times moderately or as high as you can, clapping your hands over your head and opening and closing your legs to the sides, then sit down and wait until your heart rate and breathing slow down. The feeling of relaxation will appear with the decrease in heart rate and breathing rate.
- Take a deep breath through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. As we mentioned before, a soothing word can be said while doing this.



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- Tighten and release those parts of your body where you feel the tension for several minutes.
- Do ten pushups and then relax, take a deep breath.
 - Run fast in place and then rest.
 - Lie on your back on a soft surface, concentrate on your muscles and relax them - one by one. Sit on a chair, let your arms and hands hang freely, your feet against the floor. Close your eyes, breathe calmly

And when all of these do not help or if the anxiety is severe and does not decrease:

Contact one of Helplines on the phone or chat and if necessary, consult your family doctor about medicines that can help relieve anxiety and help you sleep.

We'd love to hear if these pages have been helpful to you, and we've given some ideas that worked for you so that we will make them widely available.