



MedCircle

Your Mental Health Guide to Coronavirus





We are living in uncertain times, and not just with the coronavirus; changes in the stock market, school and sports closures, shocking news headlines, and widespread social distancing are all contributing to global stress and anxiety.

We understand that each of these situations can create overwhelm, worry, sadness, and fear.

Therefore, we reached out to some of our doctors to provide resources, tips, and tools to help you not only get through this difficult time, but to come out even stronger on the other side.

Information, when acted upon, is power. Please use this resource guide to help you learn, act, and support yourself as well as those you care about.

Remember, whatever you're going through, you've got this!

Check out these FREE educational series on managing anxiety, depression, and fear:

[Understanding the Anxious Self](#)

[Debunking Depression](#)

[Overcoming Stress & Sleep Issues](#)



A portrait of Dr. Ramani Durvasula, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a red top, sitting on a couch. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

Dr. Ramani Durvasula  
MedCircle Certified Educator, Clinical Psychologist, Professor

What are some common mental health patterns you're seeing during this challenging time?

**Dr. Ramani:** Anxiety is the key phenomenon. It cuts across all mental illnesses and mental health issues. Those with pre-existing anxiety are experiencing major upticks, and it's impacting numerous areas of their lives including sleep disturbance, difficulties with concentration, and unhealthy choices (e.g. poor food choices, drug use, and alcohol use). In addition, people are curtailing patterns that are healthy for them. They may not be going to the gym to exercise, or places of worship where they would get social support. They may not go to movies or concerts, which would be sources of relaxation.

This anxiety may also manifest as rumination (e.g. thinking about money or illness on an endless loop) which distracts from life and can diminish mood. Additionally, people are facing multiple stressors such as loss of income, loss of childcare, and changes to routine—and the rules are changing daily—so people are having to adjust and re-adjust, which again, is stressful.

Based on these patterns, what are three ideas or strategies you would recommend that people can use to reduce unnecessary anxiety?

**Dr. Ramani:** If you are in therapy, and can't get to the therapist's office or the therapist is quarantined (or you are quarantined), ask for remote sessions. The continuity and tools offered by therapy can help both uncertainty and pronounced cases of anxiety.

Additionally, try to distract yourself from the panic going on around you. There are few strategies that work better at times like this. Whether it's watching TV, reading a book, calling a friend, or engaging in another hobby, do something to get your mind off of it. Avoid social media and the news. The endless news cycle on the coronavirus only contributes to more anxiety. Practice mindfulness, meditation, and try to exercise at home if you can't get out. These daily practices are known to help with anxiety, and again, if you are quarantined, this may be a great way to turn these healthy coping mechanisms into habits.

If you want to help people, and are not living under quarantine, take special care to be cautious. If you have a friend or family member who is struggling, just listen and reassure. If someone who is quarantined or sick needs food or the like, try to help out in a way that safeguards both of you.

What are the mental health effects of "social distancing" strategies during this time?

**Dr. Ramani:** Mercifully, we have FaceTime and other video chatting apps that let us stay in touch. Not being in the world takes a toll on people and may leave people feeling blue or even depressed.

What are your favorite resources for staying informed?

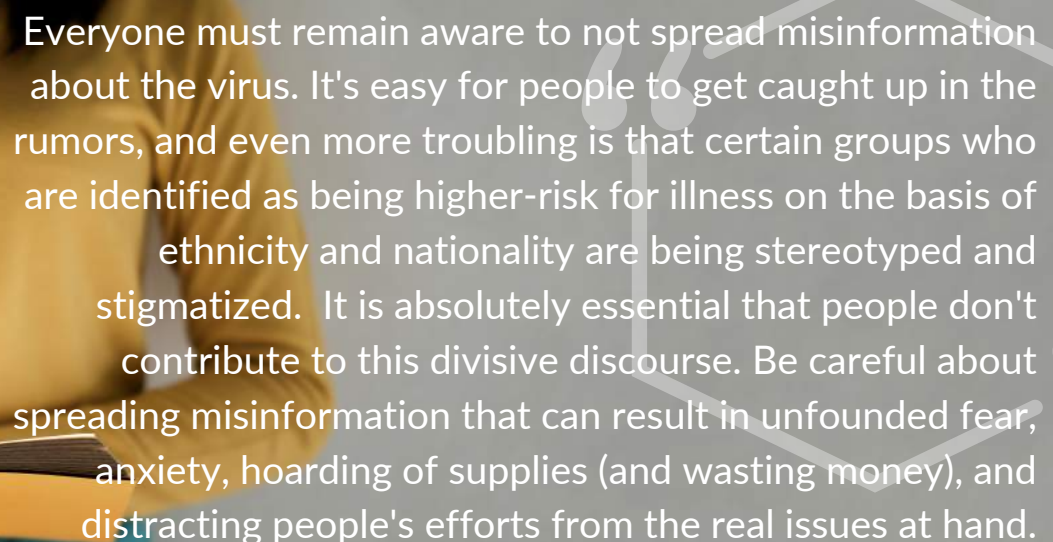
**Dr. Ramani:** I like going to legitimate sources such as the CDC, the NIH, and the WHO. As a psychologist, I also look at the website of the American Psychological Association (APA) to find out how to best help my clients. I also turn to the *Los Angeles Times* for local updates, and I check my email regularly to learn about things that affect me and my professional space.

Is there a way to leverage this challenging time to create a better life in both the present and future, and help others?

**Dr. Ramani:** If you are quarantined and healthy, use the time well. Complete those tasks that you never get the chance to finish! You may need to work remotely, so if you're saving commute time, try to use it well.

Maintaining social ties may be a great tool to cope, so call friends and catch up!

Don't hoard too many resources. If you have enough, then think about the greater good! Your 1,000 rolls of toilet paper may mean you have a neighbor who can't find any.

A person wearing a yellow sweater is shown from the chest down, holding an open book. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. Overlaid on the right side of the image is a large, light grey quotation mark graphic. The text of the quote is centered and overlaid on the image.

Everyone must remain aware to not spread misinformation about the virus. It's easy for people to get caught up in the rumors, and even more troubling is that certain groups who are identified as being higher-risk for illness on the basis of ethnicity and nationality are being stereotyped and stigmatized. It is absolutely essential that people don't contribute to this divisive discourse. Be careful about spreading misinformation that can result in unfounded fear, anxiety, hoarding of supplies (and wasting money), and distracting people's efforts from the real issues at hand.

- Dr. Ramani



Dr. Judy Ho  
MedCircle Certified Educator, Triple Board Certified Neuropsychologist

What are some common mental health patterns you're seeing during this challenging time?

**Dr. Judy:** When human beings are confronted with unknowns, they tend to be more fearful, and the social media "contagion effect" tends to take hold more. So when people face challenges like the coronavirus, they're much more likely to let emotions rule and even *override* their logic. A really common pattern is that when there's a big unknown, that's when people seem to be the most afraid, and that's when they make emotional decisions, and go to sources online that are not as credible and may not be giving the most helpful information.

Based on these patterns, what are three ideas or strategies you would recommend that people can use to reduce unnecessary anxiety?

**Dr. Judy:** First, make sure that you follow the official recommendations of credible sources like the CDC. They have very specific strategies for what you can do to protect yourself.

If you see anybody exhibiting any kinds of symptoms of mild cold or flu, stay away from them. Don't feel embarrassed to move seats on a bus or in a crowded area, because we all have to do our best to protect ourselves. Also, if you're in the higher-risk population, avoid crowded spaces altogether.

Some helpful statistics to remember: 50 to 60 percent of us may end up contracting the coronavirus at some point, but 80 to 90 percent of us will likely just recover at home with mild cold- or flu-like symptoms. For the small proportion of people who will need hospital care, only a very tiny proportion of that will have a fatality related to COVID-19.

An additional measure you can take is that if you start to see some mild symptoms of cold or flu in yourself, don't wait. Talk to your primary care provider right away. Check in with them. Ask them if you need to come in to get tested, because what we're finding is that some of these individuals who have fatalities from the coronavirus waited for two or three weeks after they were symptomatic to even seek medical care. Be more vigilant about that now, and seek medical care sooner.

## What are your favorite resources for staying informed?

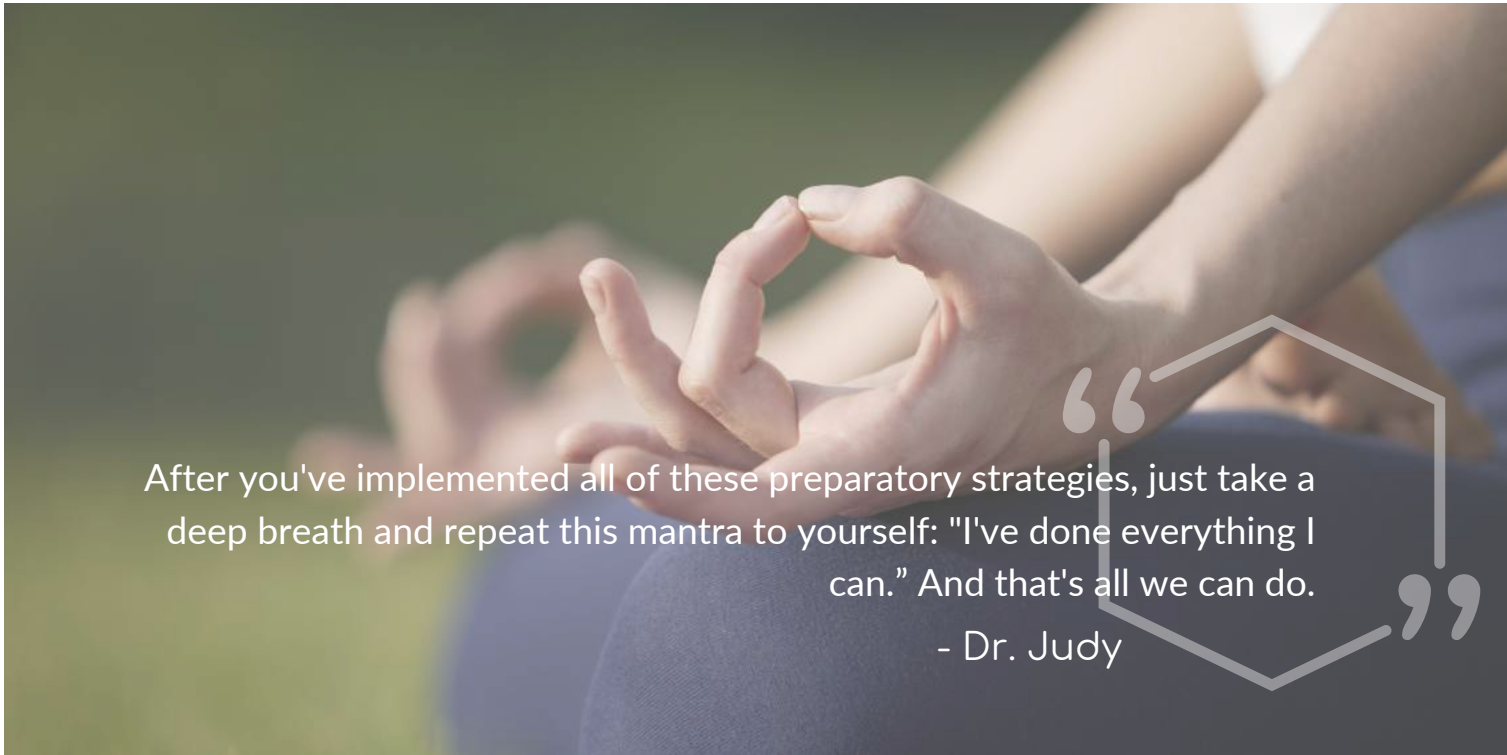
**Dr. Judy:** For those in the United States, the CDC is a great resource. Outside of the U.S., WHO is great. Both give very specific tips on how to protect yourself.

## What are some of the mental health effects of social distancing, and some strategies to effectively cope?

**Dr. Judy:** Humans still need some level of community; this level of isolation is not helpful for us. When we are alone, interestingly, our fight-or-flight actually amps us more. It makes sense because as social animals, we are protecting one another by being in crowds—by being with one another—because other people can help you ward off any type of threat coming your way. With that said, social distancing can lead to a level of chronic stress, and chronic stress is bad for our mental and physical health. If we can't get together with our loved ones with everything going on right now, what we *can* do is take better care of ourselves. Consider mindfulness strategies to relax your body and mind in order to counteract some of those fight-or-flight issues.

## Is there a way to leverage this challenging time to create a better life in both the present and future, and help others?

**Dr. Judy:** Absolutely. Even if you're not the one who's ill, if you are feeling healthy, you have to try to educate people around you, take care of those affected, inform yourself and others, and help others calm down. Giving back to the community and helping others will also help improve your own stress levels and mental health. Be kind to others, educate others, and calm others down if you have the capacity to do so.



After you've implemented all of these preparatory strategies, just take a deep breath and repeat this mantra to yourself: "I've done everything I can." And that's all we can do.

- Dr. Judy





Dr. Domenick Sportelli  
MedCircle Certified Educator, Double Board Certified Psychiatrist

What are some common mental health patterns you're seeing during this challenging time?

**Dr. Dom:** I'm certainly seeing an increase in generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and mood disorders. The world has become a very small place where media (both social and otherwise) is in our face constantly. Judgment, criticism, harsh opinions, war, and disease are all just a click away. A constant barrage of politics and perceived catastrophe is shaping our daily perception of reality.

When it comes to our emotional and mental health, we feel and experience what our minds focus on. So we "perceive" and subsequently "feel" what we mentally engage in. Unfortunately, much of the bias of media and social media is simply not our current reality.

Imagine someone watches footage from a war-torn country every night on the news. That person can become anxious. Their body and mind may prepare the fight-or-flight response. They may become short of breath, have racing thoughts, or experience another physiological symptom—even if there's no actual danger to them in that moment. Of course, it's important to be informed, prepared, and educated. However, we must also remain grounded in our current, stable and (likely) safe reality.

Based on these patterns, what are three ideas or strategies you would recommend that people can use to reduce unnecessary anxiety?

**Dr. Dom:** As a psychiatrist, I see people "in crisis" in the ER, on the psychiatric units, and even in outpatient treatment. The most important point to remember is that your frame of reference (i.e. everything you are feeling and experiencing) is coming from a place of bias. When in crisis, you are blinded and overcome by the overwhelming nature of what you are feeling, and this is often inflated and magnified.



The mind builds momentum very quickly with negative thinking, and it's easy to become lost and feel overwhelmed, when reality may not be that bad.

I use the analogy of a bad storm. When we are in the midst of a dark, windy, horrible storm, we can't even imagine what the sun looks like or where it is. But, if you were able to look at the radar picture of the storm from above, you may see the way out, or that it's going to pass very soon. In short, remember to keep perspective. The storm will pass.

How can we better support those struggling during this challenging time?

**Dr. Dom:** If you are a supporter, remember you can provide perspective and encouragement to a loved one experiencing a challenging time. You can be the “radar view from above” that the one you love may have a hard time seeing during their "storm."

You would be incredibly surprised how powerful genuine caring, support, and encouragement can be. Understand that you may not understand what an individual is going through or feeling, but that matters very little when it comes to support.

Be careful with “advice” or telling people to “not worry” or “get over it.” This just makes it clear to the person suffering that you have no idea what they're going through, which isolates them even further. Remember, if someone had the power to stop their own emotional suffering, they certainly would.

Let your loved one know that you are there for them. Help them with resources—perhaps a good book, therapist, or support group. Educate yourself on the illness that they may be dealing with in order to support them in a more specific and understanding manner.



## How can we prevent negative outcomes and protect ourselves and our loved ones?

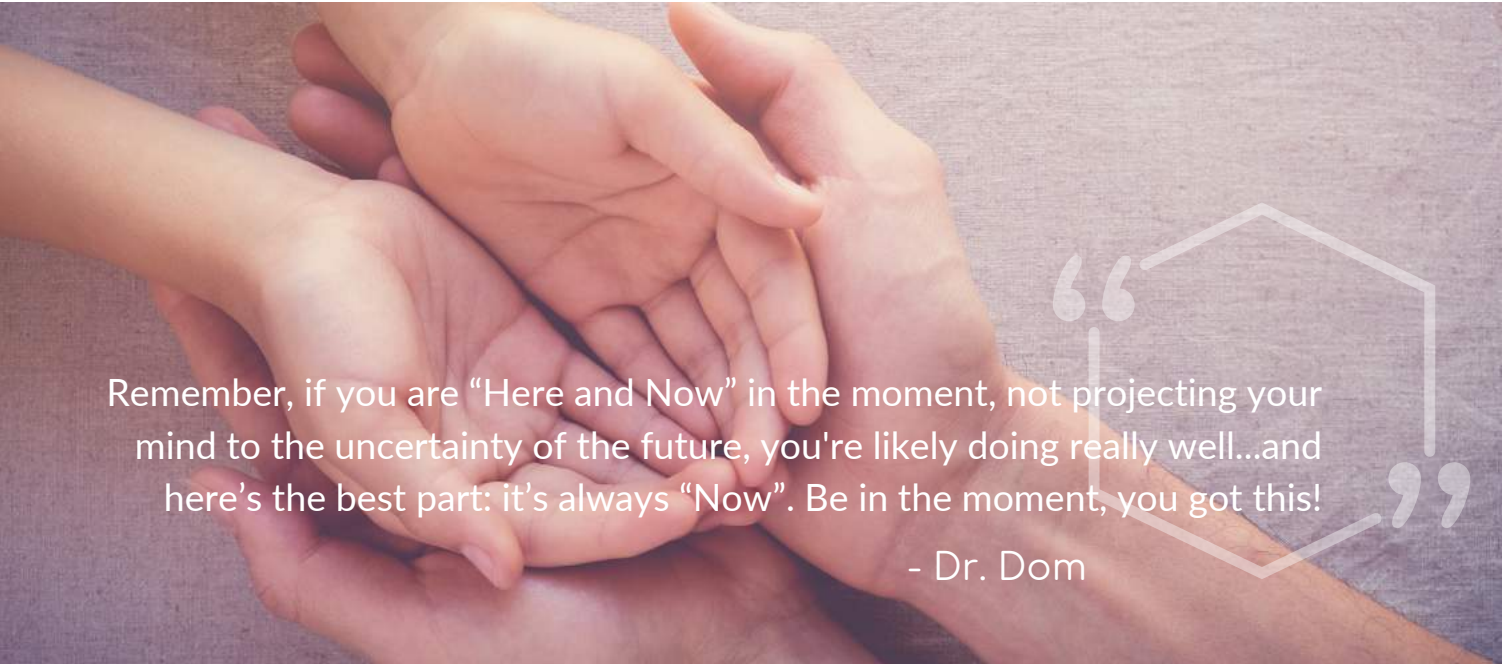
**Dr. Dom:** When it comes to prevention, get to know yourself: what triggers you? Is it the news, social media, work stress, or something else? The first step is identifying the trigger. Then, you can look at it rationally and act as your own “defense attorney” to debunk and rationalize some of the negative thoughts and biased emotions surrounding that trigger. Then, incorporate a coping strategy that works! Know when to step back, look around, gain perspective, and be in the moment—where things are never as bad as they seem.

Meditation, exercise, deep breathing, changing environments, going for a walk, positive mantras, visualization techniques, and mindfulness practices are some of my favorite coping methods.

Avoid negative coping strategies such as alcohol use, drug use, excessive sleep, isolation, and avoidance to escape. Try not to “over-control” the situation. Most relief comes from reframing your thoughts and “letting go” rather than trying to “over-control.” The irony is that the more you “let go,” the more emotional power and control you may gain.

## What are your favorite resources for staying informed?

**Dr. Dom:** My favorite resources are peer-reviewed, up-to-date research articles from sources like *PubMed* and other high-impact factor publications. However, in order to decipher some of this research, it takes a trained eye to appraise it well. So for those out there unfamiliar with academic research, I recommend [MedCircle](#) for psychology and behavioral health content, the CDC for current infectious disease updates, the WHO for medical and health concerns, the APA publications, and the American Medical Association (AMA) publications.



Remember, if you are “Here and Now” in the moment, not projecting your mind to the uncertainty of the future, you're likely doing really well...and here's the best part: it's always “Now”. Be in the moment, you got this!

- Dr. Dom

# Some Information About the Coronavirus

Learn more prevention and protection guidelines for COVID-19 from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

## 1 Learn

*The coronavirus responsible for the current outbreak has been named **COVID-19**: **CO** for Corona, **VI** for virus, **D** for disease, and **19** because this novel strain of the virus was first discovered in 2019.*

### How does it spread and what are the symptoms?

- This virus spreads between people in close contact with each other, and through respiratory droplets from an infected person.
- Symptoms usually appear 2-14 days after exposure and include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
- Contact your doctor if you or a loved one demonstrates symptoms.

### Who might be at higher risk?

- Those with chronic medical conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or compromised immune systems.
- Pregnant or nursing women and small children should take extra precaution though, so far, research has not shown extra risk in these populations.

### What are some ways to prevent the spread of illness?

- Clean your hands often with soap and warm water or sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands.
- Avoid close contact with those that are sick, if possible.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched frequently.

### How do you respond if you become sick?

- Stay home if you are sick except when seeking medical care.
- Limit contact with others and animals as much as possible and avoid sharing household items. Sanitize often.
- Cover coughs and sneezes, and wash hands afterwards.
- Wear a mask if you are sick. You do not need to wear one if not sick unless you are in a caregiver role.
- Monitor your symptoms. Follow home isolation guidelines if recommended. Containment is not only viable, but necessary to curtail the spread of this virus.

## 2 Protect

## 3 Respond





# Key Takeaways

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Keep these key takeaways in mind as you approach these situations. Reach out to a medical professional if you or your loved one needs help—physically or mentally.

## Top Tips

- Learn as much as you can from credentialed resources and stay informed as additional resources become available.
- Protect yourself and your loved ones by keeping surfaces and hands clean.
- Limit time with those who are currently infected as not to further spread the virus.
- Stay in the moment as much as possible, and help where you can.
- If you're able, consider areas and ways in which you can help those in need.
- Take care of your body and mind by using strategies that are proven to work. Remember sleep, proper nutrition, and movement are essential to your immune system health.
- Remember this situation is temporary and will pass. Put focus on what you can do, and try not to ruminate on things beyond your control.

## Learn More

- [MedCircle.com](https://www.medcircle.com)
- [Dr. Ramani Durvasula](#)
- [Dr. Domenick Sportelli](#)
- [Dr. Judy Ho](#)
- [Center for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](https://www.who.int)
- [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](https://www.nih.gov)
- [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](https://www.apa.org)
- [American Medical Association \(AMA\)](https://www.ama-assn.org)





MedCircle

The most trusted source for mental health information.

