

Coping well during this challenging time

Why it is important to cope well during this challenging time

The situation with coronavirus that we all find ourselves in is unique, for most people, never have we had such uncertainty about our health and well-being. Because this threat is invisible it makes it feel even more threatening and **we all feel this threat**. For people with other health conditions such as psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis this feeling of threat is amplified and these hints and tips are designed to help people living with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis manage their worry about their condition and its treatment.

Remember: The 3 conditions that create stress and anxiety:

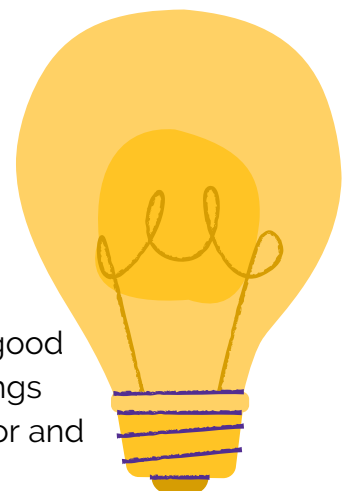
1. when events are sudden or unexpected;
2. when events are unpleasant;
3. when events are uncontrollable.



All three apply to the coronavirus. Except that.....we can have some control, over what happens in our homes, what we think, what we feel and over our own behaviour so let's start there.

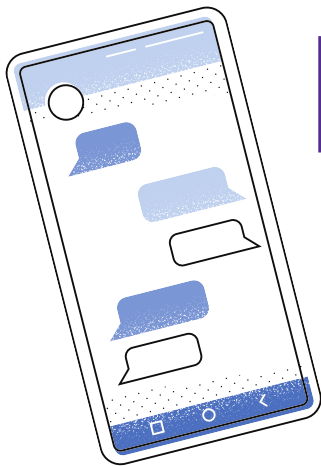
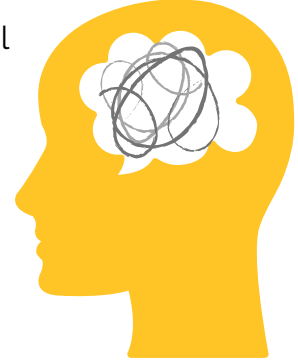
When we feel anxious or stressed we either isolate ourselves (call it **suppressing**) or ruminate excessively (thinking deeply), we may also bombard others with our worry (call it **expressing**), both are understandable reactions to anxiety but they are not helpful and we need to manage both types of responses.

Do Identify which form of coping you are using, are you phoning family or friends too often asking the same questions? Are you checking news bulletins or reading about it obsessively. Or are you closing yourself off and not keeping in touch with loved ones and ignoring messages to stay at home? Knowing which type of response you are using will decide how to manage it. Think back to difficulties you have managed in the past, what did you do well? Make a note of things others may think are good about you and remind yourself at least once a day about those things (when cleaning your teeth for example, look at yourself in the mirror and remind yourself of those qualities).



Suppressing your worry

Do Recognise you should be concerned, this is a real threat, but it's possible to manage aspects of it. Burying your head in the sand, believing it's not going to affect you at all, or at worse, thinking it will just be like a heavy cold is not helpful. It will stop you helping yourself and your loved ones to stay safe. You must take reasonable precautions against spreading this virus and a little bit of worry is quite normal and functional. Plan for the worse but expect the best is a good way to think.



Do Check in with family or friends, it may well be important to them to hear from you, they will be concerned about you. You can helpfully manage their anxiety by reassuring them you are ok and you will keep in contact with them. You can be the role model for an appropriate level of concern and how to channel it into action when needed.

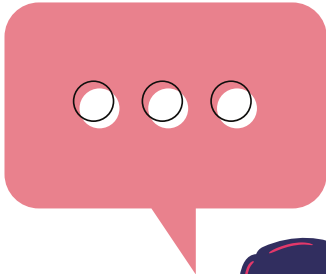
Do Make sure you are informed, it can be difficult to know where to turn for good advice but for general health and well-being advice BBC radio, TV news and websites are good sources. For specific advice about psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, the Psoriasis Association is excellent, the team at the Psoriasis Association are in touch with dermatology, rheumatology and other experts and are channelling information to you. Be wary of newspapers and websites that make claims that seem odd or very different to the mainstream. This can cause confusion and make you want to close down even more.



However, if you can't even begin to think about it without it causing you panic, you need to read below for tips on how to cope.

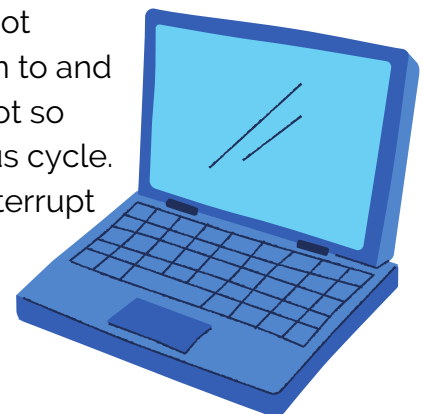
Expressing worry and anxiety

Remember: it is usual to look for reassurance at this difficult time, but doing it excessively will make things more difficult for you to manage.



Do Agree with family or friends how often you will phone or speak with them and limit it to what they agree with you is manageable. During the time you are not speaking with people, if you find yourself constantly mulling things over before speaking to them, try to keep a list of things you really want to know the answer to or focus on. Running over the same things in conversations will just fuel your anxiety. Find something good that has happened during the day and tell them about it, social media is good for this (I know there are other sides to social media too), even if it's a small act of kindness you heard about or something humorous, this is a healthy way of discharging worry. It's important to keep balance and perspective in your thinking. We all like being around positive people who lift our spirits, this is a really important role at the moment.

Do Stay informed, generally things are changing rapidly but try to limit your reading or listening to the news to once or twice a day, listening on the hour, every hour is not helpful and will create more anxiety. When we are worried or depressed we selectively listen to information, not deliberately, this is one of the ways anxiety works. We listen to and therefore hear more worrying things than others who are not so anxious and this confirms our concerns and sets up a vicious cycle. We can break this cycle by adding in other activities that interrupt this worrisome thinking, it is called distraction and it works. Find something that works for you. An old or new hobby or project. If possible do it with someone else in your home. Music or podcasts can help.



Specific worries about psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis are best dealt with by looking at the Psoriasis Association website, or talking to someone who really does know the answer to your question. Bear in mind things are less certain than they might have been before this problem but avoid chat rooms and forums where other anxious people might be expressing their worry too or they may have misinterpreted something, as this will fuel your worry more. Use trusted information sources.

Managing isolation

Do Try to have a routine, we are probably not used to being home alone as much as this and this in itself can be stressful as we speak to fewer people and tend to listen to our own thoughts more. Keep a pattern of activity that looks like a normal day, get up around 8, have meals at regular times and go to bed at a reasonable time, for some this may be around 10.00-11.00 but stick to your routine if it is serving you well.



Do Stay occupied, the important thing is to try to be occupied mentally and physically with something during each day. (see our suggested timetable). Learn how to set up a group chat on your phone or tablet, get a family member to help talk you through setting up a means of keeping in touch and put this in your timetable of things to do every few days.

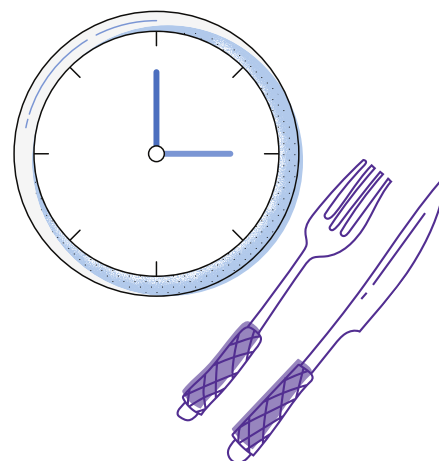
Do Speak to someone every day, if not in person, on the phone, over the internet or over the back wall, your neighbour may be feeling the same way as you and welcome the interaction. Many people are re-discovering their 'neighbourhood'.

Keep active, it is even more important that you stay active and not reduce physical activity to help your joints stay flexible. Stay active within your usual limits but add it to your timetable to remind you to do the stretching or exercise. This may be a good time to gently increase your flexibility and activity. Physical activity is good for your mental health also. There are some really good YouTube videos of how to stay active.



It's tempting to use smoking or alcohol to manage anxiety, both are very unhelpful ways of coping. Smoking makes the effects of stress worse and heavy use of alcohol might numb you for a short time but the rebound tends to make coping even harder and so you reach for the alcohol more regularly. This sets up a vicious cycle, heavy drinking (by that I mean every night and at least two large drinks) reduces the quality and quantity of sleep and can trigger a flare. Don't let it become a habit that is difficult to break.

Do Have regular mealtimes, it is concerning that you see hoarding behaviour on the news and in the shops but this is not usual, there is food on the shelves but you might not get your usual order, many communities have set up order points for people to make sure everyone has the food and other provisions that they need. Ask around for what's been organised in your area.



Do Remember this situation is extreme, nobody is free of worry over this and it is going to test everyone's ability to cope, especially you, with extra health worries. Although, it is not going to last forever but it is the new normal for the foreseeable future so it's best to be proactive, organise and adapt. Focus on the things you can control, share your worries but limit the talk about them, see if you can find someone else in a similar position or someone you can help by sharing these tips.

When to access help and support...

Reach out, if you feel your mood plummeting and you are having thoughts about not being able to survive this, you need to speak to a professional, the Samaritans are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on the telephone (116 123), by email (jo@samaritans.org) or online (www.samaritans.org).



The Psoriasis Association is a good place to speak about your psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis treatment if you are concerned. Don't do this alone, we really are all in this together and there will be someone willing to listen.



With thanks to Professor Chris Bundy for her assistance in writing this article.