

# Coping with “What If” Anxiety during COVID-19

Over the course of the pandemic, you’ve probably experienced intense emotions that change moment to moment. When you listen to the news, when you interact with others, and when you try to process your experiences, you may find yourself stuck trying to picture a way forward. Your thoughts may turn to imagining only the worst-case scenarios.

You may be anxious about a return to high levels of COVID-19 cases and thinking, “What if...it gets worse?”. You may be anxious for your loved ones and thinking, “What if...someone I know gets sick?”. You may be anxious about having to change your routine yet again and thinking, “What if...life is never the same again?”.



When the “what ifs” begin to drown out all other thoughts and affect your ability to do everyday tasks, you may be experiencing anxiety. “What if” or “anticipatory” anxiety can cause:

- difficulty concentrating
- trouble managing your emotions and your mood
- emotional numbness
- loss of interest in your hobbies
- nervousness or restlessness
- muscle tension and pain
- nausea and loss of appetite
- trouble sleeping

The good news is that you can break out of this cycle of anxiety. Here are some tips to help:

- **Use your support system.** Try talking about your concerns with a loved one or someone you trust. Start the conversation by sharing a worry you have. Hearing that others have the same worries or understand where you’re coming from can make you feel better.
- **Practice gratitude.** Focusing on being thankful can shift your mindset to more positive emotions and thoughts. Start saying one thing you’re thankful for when you sit down for dinner every night. It can be as simple as, “I’m thankful the sun came out today.”
- **Have compassion for yourself.** You deserve the same compassion you show others. Treat yourself with love and kindness. Talk to yourself in a soothing manner like you would a friend or a family member who is having a hard time.
- **Train your brain.** Use breathing exercises, mindfulness, and other relaxation techniques to engage your sympathetic nervous system and rewire your brain to a calmer state.
- **Ask for help.** You don’t have to deal with this on your own. Optima EAP is just a phone call away. We can provide counseling and support to help you through this time.

We’re all doing our best to manage through this ever-changing environment. It’s normal to feel any number of emotions, including anxiety. Be kind to yourself. Be kind to others. We’ll get through this together.

Call us at 1-800-899-8174 or visit  
OptimaEAP.com.

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