

# Coping With COVID-19 When You Have a Mental Health Condition

COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020.

The new coronavirus is an infectious respiratory illness that is transmitted from person to person like regular flu, but with a relatively low fatality rate compared to SARS, MERS, and H1N1.

Not much is known about COVID-19 at this point, which understandably causes fear and distress especially for us who have anxiety-related conditions.

Amidst the panic-buying (a.k.a toilet paper hoarding) and frequent handwashing, we think this is a good time to hit the pause button and remind ourselves that resilience and hope (even humour) can be just as contagious.

We can rise above the chaos. Here are seven practical suggestions to empower ourselves:

1. Write down what you can and cannot control. Fear and anxiety are natural responses to the unknown. Journal your thoughts and see what are the things you can change and what are those you can't. For example, we can't confront every person who doesn't cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, but we can walk away from them and keep a safe distance.
2. Do not skip your medical appointments. Consult your doctor to see if your appointments can be rearranged; whether it's possible to meet less frequently, or if there are other ways to have your sessions without meeting physically. Another way to minimize exposure each time you visit the hospital or clinic is to align your medical appointments on one day if possible, or have them less frequently according to your doctor's advice.
3. Ask if your medication can be delivered instead of collected in person. Hospitals and polyclinics under Sing health offer this option. Some hospitals like Khoo Teck Puat hospital have a Medibox which functions like a parcel delivery locker that allows you to collect your medication refills at your own time, so you need not wait at the hospital pharmacy with the crowd.
4. Limit your exposure to media and yes, that includes muting family chat groups that spread well-meaning but also fear-mongering fake news. Get your information from reputable sources, be updated once or twice a day, and then fill the rest of your day with other meaningful activities.
5. There are many of us who feel the need to wash our hands frequently which can trigger anxiety-driven compulsions and obsessive behaviour. If possible, we could use this as an opportunity to practice personal self-care in a mindful way.