

KELLY WATKINS

CORONA, COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY.



**A SELF HELP GUIDE TO MANAGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH
DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.**

ABOUT KELLY WATKINS

I am a qualified Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, accredited with the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies. I am also a qualified Forensic Psychologist registered with The Health and Care Professionals Council.

During this unprecedented time people are not only struggling physically but also mentally. I have written this e-book filling it with tips and techniques to help you and your loved ones maintain your mental health during such a difficult time.

I have listed below how to contact me and follow my work.

Soundcloud: [rejuvenatingyou.cbt](https://soundcloud.com/rejuvenatingyou.cbt)

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If you are currently in therapy see if there can be arrangements to maintain the therapy over the phone and/or online.

If you've had CBT before then the skills and techniques you learned previously can be implemented if you're fears around coronavirus are spiralling. So, dig out your previous therapy notes and recordings, and refresh your memory. A lot of the same basic principles will apply here



Please note these tips are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or emergency support if you need it contact your GP or NHS 111 and don't be alarmed if these services are a lot busier than usual.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF DURING THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (Covid 19), can be scary and can affect our mental health. For many of us it is something like we have never experienced before. It seems so surreal but as it is becoming more and more part of our reality and it is likely to have an impact on our mental health. While it is important to stay informed and follow appropriate guidelines, there are also many things we can do to support and manage our wellbeing during such times.

Approximately 40 million American adults – roughly 18% of the population – have an anxiety disorder, while in the UK there were 8.2 million cases of anxiety in 2013. There are few statistics about health anxiety, but it can affect those who have an existing anxiety disorder or those who have experienced a life event such as bereavement, birth trauma or an accident. In times like these, where a global pandemic is taking up most of the media conversation, it can be even more difficult to stay calm.

Anxiety UK's Nicky Lidbetter explains, the fear of being out of control and unable to tolerate uncertainty are common characteristics of many anxiety disorders. So it's understandable that many individuals with pre-existing anxiety are facing challenges at the moment.

It is not just anxiety it can impact, Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) fears about contamination or your health, including those triggered by the current coronavirus situation, can be paralysing. As well as the potential impact of being self-isolated, with individuals whom you often do not spend much time with or being along could trigger feelings of depression, panic, post-traumatic stress disorder as well as problematic personality traits.

Of course this situation can impact your mental health without the need for a diagnosis, the most important thing is that you use the tips and techniques that help you and perhaps share with others if you can see they are struggling.

QUICK TIPS

DON'T WORRY I WILL GO INTO MORE DETAIL WITH THESE.

- Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that could cause you distress.
- Seek information only for taking practical steps to look after yourself and loved ones.
- Set specific times when you can look for information.
- Stay connected with others who have a positive impact.
- Wash your hands but not excessively.
- Challenge your thoughts by rationalising them with facts.
- Have a self-care schedule.



AVOID WATCHING, READING OR LISTENING TO NEWS THAT COULD MAKE YOU DISTRESSED.

During this time it seems that everything you see, read or hear is about the coronavirus or some related news. It might seem that this is unmanagable but it can be managed. We all want to be kept up to date with the goings on but set a time every day that you will look for an update and stick to that time and also set a length of time you will look e.g. 10 minutes.

Remember this is only to look for practical tips, this does not include scoring the internet or social media to read stories which will not all be fact based and will often increase your anxiety and make you feel worse than you did in the first place.

There is a lot of misinformation swirling around - stay informed by sticking to trusted sources of information such as government and NHS websites.

Don't be afraid of having breaks from social media or fine tuning it. Be aware of what accounts you follow and consider avoiding clicking on coronavirus or related hashtags.

You might want to mute triggering words on twitter or unfollow or mute certain accounts on social media.

Take some time away from social media. It might be a good time to do something else such as speaking to a friend, listening to music, watching TV or reading books.

When speaking to others it is ok to mute WhatsApp groups and hide Facebook posts and feeds if you find them too overwhelming. If you are in person with someone who is speaking about something, do not be afraid to explain to them that you are finding the conversation distressing and perhaps change the subject to something we love to chat about . . . The Weather.

WASH YOUR HANDS BUT NOT EXCESSIVELY

i know you might be asking well what is excessive?

Particularly when we are being overwhelmed by the guidance to wash our hands. Please check the current guidance for hand-washing and stick to that.

I know it is not that simple when you have OCD or health anxiety. If you are struggling to know how much is too much?

Ask yourself what is the function of me washing my hands?

For example, is the washing being carried out for the recommended amount of time to reduce the risk of spreading of the virus - or is it being done ritualistically in a specific order to feel "just right"? If it is the latter then we know that our behaviour is being fuelled by our OCD, which could indicate we need to spend some time reminding ourselves of the CBT techniques we know to help such as ERP (there are some great free ERP self-help resources online but this does not replace help from a qualified professional). If you are still struggling to know what is excessive seek advice from a family member or friend on what is considered "normal".

Washing your hands to the level of advice, rather than at the level OCD is demanding may not feel sufficient, but that's CBT right there, you're choosing not to do behaviour because of OCD and you're choosing to ride out the anxiety!

Don't Inflate the Risk

The media are doing their best to scare us, don't let them or your OCD/Anxiety inflate the risk. Like with most of our OCD fears, regardless of what they are, there is a risk, relatively small, but OCD and Anxiety will inflate that to make it seem significantly higher than it actually is. At the risk of providing reassurance, let's look at the stats. Every single flu season, tens of thousands of people die globally every year. Public Health England told ITV News: "The average number of deaths in England for the last five seasons, 2014 to 2019, was 17,000 deaths annually".

Coronavirus is unpleasant and does pose a risk to the elderly and those with underlying health problems, but for the vast majority that develop the condition, they will experience mild to moderate illness, the symptoms not much worse than winter flu. try not to allow our OCD to inflate that fact.

GIVE THOSE ANXIOUS AND OCD THOUGHTS NO WHERE TO GO.

In many respects OCD and anxiety is about worrying about something that might be a problem, because it's got potential to be a problem. In an ideal world we will tell ourselves we will worry about it when it DOES become a problem and not a moment before.

However we often manage to predict things will be a problem before they have even become a "thing".

Another trick OCD and anxiety have is thriving on uncertainty. For example if you say "I might be contaminated because that person looked like they had a temperature"

Because of the word 'might' we create the uncertainty that anxiety and OCD thrive on.

But if you tell yourself 'I am contaminated and I will get sick', whilst not a pleasant thought, it actually doesn't give anxiety and/or OCD much "wiggle" room, because you have already acknowledged the worst case scenario and carried on with your activity/day despite it.

This takes practice, but these subtle changes do help change our focus and can even make OCD and anxious those lose the power to scare and worry us. If you want to make the thought lose its power even more try singing the thought out loud to the tune of "Happy Birthday" or "Twinkle, twinkle little star".

BUT this is not taking away with the general precautions you are being recommended to take it is just supporting you having more power over your overwhelming thoughts.

Seeking reassurance can make you feel calmer for a little while, but it is always temporary. Your brain creates a feedback cycle where you become increasingly reliant on reassurance, which only serves to reinforce the anxiety. It's natural to want your loved ones to tell you things will be OK, but when you start needing that reassurance several times a day it's time to take a step back.

This is the same as stockpiling, yes everyone is worried that we will not have enough things but it is just that a WORRY.

Write a shopping list and get what you need rather than being excessive and ask a friend or family member to help you rationalise your list or when you have concerns that you won't have enough to roll. This is not reassurance it is rationalising.

It might also be helpful like with the intrusive thoughts saying your deepest darkest worries out loud and even to the songs we mentioned before and then see if it feels like a real or a hypothetical worry. That is the key distinction you want to make.

GIVE THOSE ANXIOUS AND OCD THOUGHTS NO WHERE TO GO.

Ask yourself are the thoughts you having:

FACT OR OPINION.

Another way to balance your thoughts is if your loved one said that thought to you what would you say back?

Another way to challenge your persistent negative thoughts is the courtroom technique. Confront your thoughts with a rational counter-statement. For example, if your persistent thought is something like "Everyone I love will die from this virus" you can counter it with factual statements such as "Actually, most people who get Covid-19 are likely to make a full recovery, and that's assuming mum, dad and my little sister will even catch it at all."

Like with checking the news consider giving yourself half an hour to worry about this to your heart's content, and then you have to go and do something else that you enjoy.

Just because you think something, doesn't make it true.

Try to anticipate distress. It is normal to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed as we read news about the outbreak, especially if you have experienced trauma or a mental health problem in the past, or if you have a long-term physical health condition that makes you more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus. It's important to acknowledge these feelings and remind each other to look after our physical and mental health. We should also be aware of and avoid increasing habits that may not be helpful in the long term, like smoking and drinking. Try and reassure people you know who may be worried and check in with people who you know are living alone.

Remember that your anxious state isn't permanent.

When you are in it, anxiety always feels as though it will never end, but it will. It's hard to remember this, but do try. Even though we are in a public health crisis, it will get better. This booklet has provided you with loads of techniques to help you get there.

Put things in perspective. It's a worrying time, and many of us, myself included, will have loved ones who might be showing symptoms, but the tendency to jump to the worst-case scenario very rarely reflects reality. Be kind to yourself. It may be a bit cheesy, but **this too shall pass.**

GIVE THOSE ANXIOUS AND OCD THOUGHTS NO WHERE TO GO.

AnxietyUK suggests practising the "Apple" technique to deal with anxiety and worries.

Acknowledge: Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.

Pause: Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Pause and breathe.

Pull back: Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.

Let go: Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

Explore: Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

If we allow our Anxiety and OCD to dictate and we wait until our unwanted thoughts are gone, we will never do anything.

Don't wait for intrusive thoughts to go before focussing on the things you want to do.

Of course what we want to do and can do is limited due to certain restrictions at the moment. However do not let your thoughts stop you from contacting others.

If you are able to don't be afraid to speak about your anxieties or intrusions as chances are your friends without Anxiety or OCD, may also be having a bad day (about anything), they may also be sharing some of the concerns you are, so focussing on them and their problems can sometimes be helpful in allowing us to focus away from our own problems and sometimes gives us perspective on our own concerns.

Talk to your children or others who may not fully understand. Involving them in our plans for good health is essential. We need be alert to and them what they have heard about the outbreak and support them, without causing them alarm. We need to minimise the negative impact it has on them and explain the facts to them. Discuss the news with them but try and avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus. Be as truthful as possible. Let's not avoid the 'scary topic' but engage in a way that is appropriate for them.

Stay in touch with friends on social media but try not to sensationalise things. If you are sharing content, use this from trusted sources, and remember that your friends might be worried too.

Increasing numbers will join those already in self-isolation so now might be a good time to make sure you have the right phone numbers and email addresses of the people you care about.

It might be good to agree regular check-in times and feel connected to the people around you.

If you're self-isolating, strike a balance between having a routine and making sure each day has some variety. It might end up actually feeling like quite a productive two weeks. You could work through your to-do list or read a book you'd been meaning to get to. Do your best to see the silver lining.

Consider adding in connecting with others to your contingency plan.

SELF CARE IS THE BEST CARE

We have discussed some particular techniques to manage our anxiety and OCD symptoms as well as just managing your mental health. Now self-care can be reading, writing, speaking to loved ones. Basically anything that makes you feel good. I am going to discuss some tips and techniques and then on the next page get you to think about your own contingency plan.

Continue to access nature and sunlight wherever possible.

Do exercise. Even if it's just star jumps in your bedroom, or shaking your body parts like you're in the warm-up section of a hippie acting class, exercise will help get the adrenaline out of your system and channel the panic elsewhere.

Gratitude - write down three things you are grateful for.

Meditate - you can follow a guided one or simply sit or lie comfortably. Close your eyes. Make no effort to control the breath; simply breathe naturally. Focus your attention on the breath and on how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation.

Yoga you can find some amazing online classes and many yoga studios on instagram are bringing their sessions online.

Eat well getting your nutrients you need.

Stay hydrated with water.

Treat yo'self - anything that will give you a little boost can help. It doesn't need to involve spending money: you can also cook yourself something nice, have a hot bath, or listen to a song you love.

Grounding techniques - these are techniques you use to ground yourself in the moment instead of where your head is going.

Use your mind - Choose one or two broad categories, such as "musical instruments," "ice cream flavors," "mammals," or "sportl teams." Take a minute or two to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.

You may want to use a nice smell to bring you back in the moment. Inhale the fragrance slowly and deeply and try to note its qualities (sweet, spicy, sharp, citrusy, and so on).

You can use movement such as bending over to touch your toes and then very slowly standing up starting at the base of your spine.

Use your senses, name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

Use your breath by counting your in breaths for a minute "normal" breathing rate is between 9-12 breaths.

Another breathing exercise is placing one hand on your tummy and another on your chest. Breath in for the count of 3 and out for 5. If you like you can increase this to breathing in for 5 and out for 8. Repeat as necessary.

YOUR CONTINGENCY PLAN

Note down what you would like to put in place, if it is limiting your time on social media, setting a worry time, planning on calling a friend, scheduling some self care. I invite you to use this plan or write it down and keep it somewhere you can see it. Try to do between 1-3 things a day to suit your needs. e.g monday - limit my looking at the guidelines to 10 minutes, write down three things I am grateful for and have a bath.

DAY AND TIME	ACTIVITY