

Dear fellow passengers on the same quarantine ship,

We understand you have been under a lot of stress and pressure recently. There is no remotely provided miracle advice on how to tackle anxiety, mental issues, or the virus itself; nevertheless, as clinical psychologists and psychotherapists, we have developed a set of recommendations you might find handy these days.

### **What you may be going through**

- You may be experiencing anxiety, anger, frustration, or helplessness. As a result, you may even have a feeling of shame for and/or guilt over the way you behave. Or it may make no difference to you and you may be on top of things. Or you may be watching yourself too much and be upset every time you cough. All these behaviours are normal.
- Every crisis has its end, every outbreak will pass. There have been worse epidemics in history. The coronavirus is not a plague, killing all living things. Thus, it does not pose a direct risk to life for the majority of the population.
- Adherence to the existing measures is a crucial aspect of being considerate to those whose lives may be in danger from the infection (particularly the elderly and previously ill people). If the healthcare system gets overwhelmed, it won't be able to help those in need. Wear a face mask.
- The outbreak and the measures taken will restrict our "full-fat" lives and can cause financial difficulties, but there will be a solution. Indeed, there is a solution to every problem. However, this will be on the agenda only after the infection is defeated. In the meantime, don't make any plans.
- Our bodies are capable of enduring a great deal of hardship and discomfort. It is not unusual for mankind; it's just that we've forgotten a bit about it. It is normal not to always do well.

### **What you can do for yourself**

- Actively try to keep calm and be in a good mood. Just as negative emotions and bad news can take control over you, so can the positive and good ones. If you are to infect somebody, infect them with optimism.
- After the annoyance, grumbling, and fear all fade away, people will eventually start helping each other. Be kind to each other, and don't look for someone to blame (the government, travellers, etc.) even though it's natural. Indeed, most people do not want to deliberately infect anyone. Try to find a way to be of use to others.
- Go on a media diet. There is no need to keep watching TV news and, on top of that, to actively follow it on the internet. You can be sure that you're not going to miss anything important. Ignore conspiracy theories, and put your mind to other things than the coronavirus.
- Quarantine is not a holiday. Find some fixed points in your everyday life and set a daily routine. Make the most of forced days off by dealing with your backlog. Feel free to isolate yourself in a separate room. Do not try to solve previous family quarrels right now.
- Quarantine is not a party either. A hangover impairs mental well-being and mood, so remember to take it easy.
- Talk to your children about the situation (even the youngest ones sense your uneasiness) and reassure them by saying that they are in no serious danger, but it's their grandmas and grandpas as well as sick people who must be protected.
- Physical activity, sleep, diet – the same old song, but of course depending on your individual circumstances.

- If you know how to and if you dare, really do stop. Every crisis is an opportunity, with some lessons to be learned from it. For example, you may be surprised to find that it is possible to do without a weekend spent in a shopping centre. That a lot of our needs are responses to outside offers, while in fact we do not need that much. And so on, and so forth, depending on one's philosophical mood.
- Do not behave as if you were sick unless you are really sick.

### **What you can do with respect to health professionals**

- If you have no or only mild symptoms, do not get tested for the coronavirus and stay at home. If you are scared of the virus, it makes no sense going to places where there is most of it.
- Do not lie to your doctors about your symptoms and having stayed abroad.
- Be polite to health professionals even if you are under stress. They are under much more stress.
- Show your support to health professionals, shop-assistants, the police, and other groups that are most at risk and working at the limits of their capacities; they need it.

### **What you can do when being invaded by more severe anxiety**

- If you are affected by more severe anxiety, try what we call triangle breathing: Begin by exhaling freely. Next, slowly inhale through your nose (to the count of four), hold your breath (for the count of four), and exhale slowly through your mouth (to the count of four). Repeat several times.
- Our thoughts are the major source of anxiety. They need to be stopped. Use your five senses to do that, just stop and try to say out loud or in your mind what you can see, hear, feel and smell around you, and what taste you have in your mouth. (It's all those simple things, such as I can see a table, I can hear the ticking of a clock, etc.). This will take you to the present, away from your thoughts and anxiety. Try to use it whenever your thoughts of the future start getting out of control.
- There is another method used by the U.S. Army: stop, slowly inhale and exhale for three times (activating your parasympathetic nervous system), and become aware of what you are experiencing and where you are at the moment. Name three things in your mind that you can see around you. Again, it is a way to anchor in the present moment and prevent stress you are unaware of.
- Shake your body. Yes, it may sound strange, but try to shake your entire body in an uncoordinated way for as long as you find it pleasant. Small muscle bundles in your body may be tense without you feeling it. This reduces, among other things, the long-term health impacts of prolonged stress (body shaking is the main principle of the TRE® technique used in war zones). Feel free to alternate all the methods.
- If you feel that your fears and mental issues are too much to handle on your own, use your phone or email to contact psychologists that can be found on the internet. Many of our colleagues are prepared to provide crisis intervention services remotely.

Take good care of yourselves.  
We'll handle this.

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