

Coping with bad world news

While having access to world news has many benefits, especially during a global pandemic, it can also get extremely overwhelming and take a toll on our mental health.

Being surrounded by technology, it can be hard to take a break from the news, or to know how and when to limit the amount of negative, sensational information we're receiving.

Given that watching or reading the news is an integral part of many of our lives, it's important to learn how to cope with bad world news in a healthy way.



We currently live in a world that's more connected than ever before.

Nowadays, the news is no longer limited to traditional mass media like TV and newspapers, but it also floods our social media and apps.

With so much information at our fingertips, we might feel pressured to constantly stay up to date, or worry that we're missing out on important announcements if we don't check the news.





How much is too much?



"Incredible change happens in your life when you decide to take control of what you do have power over instead of craving control over what you don't"

**STEVE MARABOLI,
BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST,
SPEAKER AND AUTHOR**



It can be tricky to know if you're feeling overwhelmed by the news – especially when feeling sad, scared, or shocked can be normal reactions to alarming events that have been reported in the media. Evolutionarily, we have a natural tendency to focus on negative information because it could serve as important cues for potential threats (Vaish, Grossmann, & Woodward, 2008).

However, if you find yourself constantly thinking about the news even after turning your attention to other activities; re-checking updates and feeling panicky, agitated or restless if you don't keep up; or feel that your reactions are interfering with your daily life, you might benefit from taking a break.

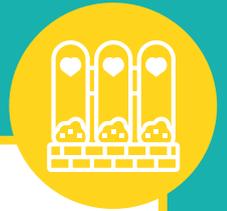
TIPS ON Coping with bad world news



SEEK RELIABLE SOURCES AND UNDERSTAND THE MEDIA'S MOTIVES

Nowadays, a lot of content creators and even news sources rely on clicks or views to generate revenue for their work, and there's been more competition to capture the viewer's attention. This has led to a rise in sensationalism – the presentation of stories in a way that is designed to provoke an exaggerated emotional response. Headlines that are crafted to grab your attention might emphasise serious consequences or harm but may not fully convey the actual risk of such events happening.

Keeping this in mind, it's especially important to seek reliable sources from trusted news agencies and websites who are able to rely less on sensationalism and put out a balanced view more consistently.



REFLECT ON YOUR LIMITS AND SET BOUNDARIES

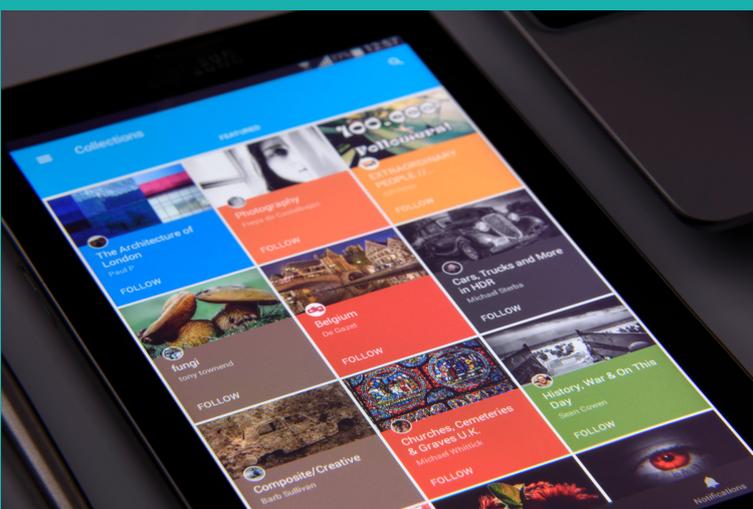
Everyone may have different triggers and it can be helpful to have a think about what part(s) of the media specifically cause distress.

For example, if you find seeing images or videos stressful, you could try downloading apps that just show the news with text or listening to the radio or podcasts.

If you find that reading the news late at night disturbs sleep, you could set a limit (for example, 6pm), after which you will not consume any news and tell yourself that you can always catch up on anything you've missed the next day.

If there are specific social media accounts or pages that are repeatedly showing you unwanted content, you can also unfollow or mute the pages or mark specific posts as 'unhelpful', which can reduce the likelihood you will be shown similar content in the future, or switch off all breaking news notifications entirely.

You can also try setting limits at family gatherings where everyone agrees not to discuss the news.





ACTIVELY SEEK POSITIVE NEWS

Stanford's Gore-Felton noted that we can actually end up feeling worse when we "deprive [ourselves] of happiness in hard times out of a sense of solidarity with those who are suffering".

In fact, it's been shown that actively seeking positive news can help us feel better, too. People who access a constructive news summary (i.e. stories that highlighted societal progress and solutions) are more likely to feel positive than those who consumed traditional news (McIntyre, 2020).

Remind yourself of things that make you happy – and search for good news in your own life, instead of just consuming bad news.



When worries inevitably arise throughout the day, you can jot them down in a notebook and come back to them during your allocated worry time!

To practice this strategy effectively, our clinical advisor Odile suggests that you can try:



scheduling your "worry time" for the same time every day



making sure that it is later in the day but not too close to bed time



keeping it shorter than 30 mins



making sure it is not in a place that is associated with comfort (e.g.: not in bed)



plan what you will do after your worry time (a fun or comforting activity)



using the worry time productively to assess if the worry is in your control or not

SET A "WORRY TIME"



This is a technique to help digest news and manage symptoms of anxiety, where you focus on worrying for a short period of time, rather than having a wide range of situations and contexts throughout your day that could potentially elicit personal worry.

It has been demonstrated to help lower levels of worry, anxiety, and insomnia among individuals with high trait levels of worry (McGowan and Behar, 2012).

if it is in your control, make a plan.

if it is outside your control, reflect: - it is worth the time and energy you are giving it?

TALK IT OUT

Seeking connection with friends, family, classmates or colleagues may help you cope with recent world events that have brought anxiety, sadness or other confusing emotions. By talking it out, you may be able to pinpoint specific things that caused fear, put them into perspective, and feel less alone.

However, it is important to remind ourselves that we cannot control other people's reactions and not everyone may have interpreted things the way we have. Just because someone is not having the same reaction does not mean yours is any less valid, nor does it mean they must eventually be convinced to have the same thoughts as you.

Remember to secure your own oxygen mask first – if you aren't okay, then you won't be able to help anyone else feel better either. No matter what goes on in the world, what you can control is how well you look after and treat yourself.



KEEP UP WITH SELF-CARE

Sometimes it is inevitable that unfortunate events happen in global affairs. After we learn about upsetting incidents, it can be helpful to engage in self-care.

For example, some newspapers may have sections on sports, or arts and culture (including restaurant, book or music reviews) which you may find interesting.

You can save some of your favourite songs in a playlist to listen to after a podcast or news clip brings you down. Or, you can take a digital detox by disconnecting from the internet for a bit and going outside for a short walk or taking a hot shower.

Choosing not to keep up with the news if it is bringing you stress doesn't make you an 'uneducated' or 'lazy' person – finding balance for yourself, no matter what that looks like, is key.



A GUIDE TO THE MUSCLE GROUPS

- Hands (clench)
- Wrists and forearms (extend and bend)
- Biceps and upper arms (bend and flex)
- Shoulders (shrug)
- Forehead (wrinkle into a frown)
- Eyes and bridge of the nose
- Cheeks and jaws (smile!)
- Around the mouth (press lips together)
- Neck (tilt head back)
- Chest (deep breath, hold, exhale)
- Back (arch up and away from floor/chair)
- Stomach (suck)
- Thighs (clench)
- Feet (point toes)

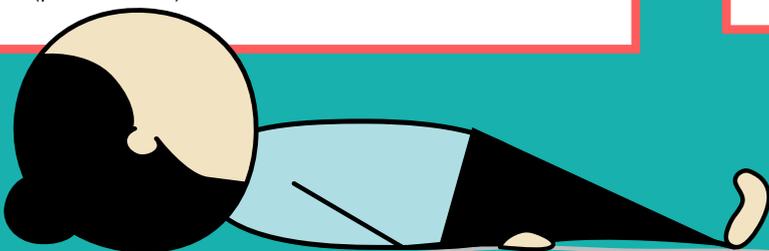
SELF-CARE IDEA: TRY PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES!

First proposed by Jacobson in 1938, the idea is to tense up and relax different muscles in your body.

A study by Szabo & Hopkinson (2007) found that with 15 minutes of progressive relaxation exercise, participants showed improvements in mood disturbance and anxiety in response to watching TV news.

FOR MORE INFO:

<https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/relaxation/relaxation.html>



youth sharing

CHARLOTTE CHAN, 22, COOLMINDS WEBSITE PROJECT COORDINATOR

I have a few news apps on my phone and at the start of the pandemic, I had the habit of checking them as little 'study breaks' in between tasks – but I always found myself getting sucked in and having a hard time redirecting my focus away from the news, even after I put my phone down! One article seemed to lead to another, and after lots of scrolling and checking, I noticed myself feeling quite drained afterwards. It was only when I started being more mindful of the kinds of headlines I was reading that I realized probably 80% of the articles I was reading was bad news, such as COVID deaths or other upsetting events that had happened. With that imbalance, and the lack of good news I was consuming, no wonder I felt low afterwards!

READ MORE TIPS FROM OUR YOUTH WRITERS ON THE COOLMINDS BLOG!

Nichole Chong, 3rd year Psychology & Neuroscience student at HKU:

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/coping-with-bad-world-news-youth-sharing-from-nichole-chong/>

Marta Gramatyka, 21, student at CUHK

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/coping-with-bad-world-news-youth-sharing-from-marta/>

Janice To, 18, 1st year Biomedicine student at University of Melbourne

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/coping-with-bad-world-news-youth-sharing-from-janice/>

Lesley Yuen, 3rd year Psychology student at Lancaster University

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/coping-with-bad-world-news-youth-sharing-from-lesley/>

further reading

1. <https://au.reachout.com/articles/dealing-with-bad-world-news>
2. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/culture/culture-news/news/a41925/10-ways-to-handle-bad-news-without-despairing/>
3. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/327516>
4. <https://www.calmmoment.com/wellbeing/how-to-cope-when-the-news-makes-you-feel-stressed-and-depressed/>
5. <https://www.health.com/condition/stress/how-to-cope-with-bad-news-anxiety-depression>
6. <https://www.readersdigest.ca/health/healthy-living/when-the-world-seems-horrible/>
7. <https://stanfordmag.org/contents/how-to-cope-with-the-news>
8. <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/health-and-other-forms-of-anxiety-and-coronavirus/>

EMERGENCY SUPPORT

If you are experiencing strong levels of distress or trauma which are interfering with your life, remember that you do not have to face it alone, and that **help is available**.

For emergency support, please contact the hotlines below:

Emergency hotline: 999

The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multilingual): (852) 2896 0000

Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2389 2222

Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2382 0000

OpenUp 24/7 online emotional support service (English/Chinese): www.openup.hk

More support services can be found [here](https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/emergency-hotlines/): <https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/emergency-hotlines/>

More non-urgent support services can be found [here](https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/communitydirectory/): <https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/communitydirectory/>



RESOURCES

www.coolmindshk.com

IG: [@coolminds.hk](https://www.instagram.com/coolminds.hk)

FB: [@coolmindshongkong](https://www.facebook.com/coolmindshongkong)

For more youth mental health information and resources, check out our Coolminds website. You can learn more about our upcoming events and trainings for parents, teachers and students, and read blog articles and stories written by young people in Hong Kong.



We're a project by:



CONTACT US

Got a question?

Write to us [here](#) or email hello@coolmindshk.com

Want to learn more? Visit our [FAQ page here](#)