



# COVID-19 & YOUR MENTAL HEALTH VIDEO SERIES COMPANION GUIDE

*Last updated: December 18, 2020*



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

STUDENT  
LIFE

Health & Wellness

**COVID-19 & Your Mental Health: *Coping strategies to help you through the pandemic*** is a three-part video series for U of T students on strategies for managing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, low mood and sadness, and frustration and irritability.

If you prefer to follow along with written instructions, this guide provides step-by-step instruction for all nine coping strategies along with quick access to video links and resources shared in the video series. The content is the same as the video series just in a summarized, written form.

**Coping strategies** are simple and quick activities you can do in the moment when you notice challenges. Strategies get better with repeated practice and when practiced in different situations. Coping strategies allow you to take back control, regain your ability to understand a situation and deal with stressors more effectively.

Watch one or all three videos to practice on your own or with a friend and consider joining a coping skills workshop from [\*\*Health & Wellness\*\*](#) to learn more strategies. If these coping strategies or your other usual coping skills aren't helping, it's important to seek help. U of T resources are available at the end of the guide.

# PART 1: COPING STRATEGIES TO MANAGE ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY

*Anxiety is a feeling of fear, worry or unease and is a reaction to stress.*

Watch Part 1: Anxiety & Uncertainty on U of T Student Life [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [YouTube](#).

## Deep breathing: 4-7-8 Relaxing Breath Exercise

1. Start in any position but keep your back straight and your tongue at the back of your upper front teeth during the entire exercise.
2. Close your mouth and inhale through your nose while mentally counting to 4.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 7.
4. Exhale completely through your mouth for a count of 8. This is one breath.
5. Repeat the steps as needed. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed up the exercise but keep the ratio of 4:7:8.

## 54321 Grounding Activity

1. Mentally name five things you see around you. As you name five things, slow down your breathing with deep breaths in and out.
2. Name four things you can touch.
3. Three things you hear.
4. Two things you smell.
5. One thing you can taste.
6. Repeat the steps as needed.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation - Tense & Relax

1. Find a quiet space and a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Focus on slowing down your breathing throughout the activity.
2. Tighten a specific muscle group for about 5-7 secs. Be deliberate but gentle.
3. Take a deep breath in through your nose while tightening your muscles and hold your breath for a few seconds.
4. Relax the tensed muscles and breathe out (about 15 secs). It might be helpful to say a certain word or phrase as you relax like 'let go' or 'it will pass'.
5. Repeat the steps as needed, noticing how it feels to be tensed and how it feels to be relaxed.

Follow the video to learn how to do a full body Tense & Relax.

## PART 2: COPING STRATEGIES TO MANAGE LOW MOOD AND SADNESS

*Low mood is characterized by feeling sad, tired or frustrated and often gets better after a few days or weeks.*

Watch Part 2: Low Mood & Sadness on U of T Student Life [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [YouTube](#).

### Get active

Exercise and brief periods of physical activity can help improve mood. The [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines](#) recommends for adults (aged 18 to 64) to accumulate at least 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous intensity, aerobic physical activity to achieve health benefits. Follow the video to learn a five-minute movement break led by [MoveU](#).

### Connect

Connect with someone or something that brings you joy like a pet or hobby. Interact safely with friends and family using a phone call, message or video chat. When feeling lonely, connect with a peer or professional through support programs and helplines.

### Thankfulness and practicing gratitude

1. Grab a piece of paper or a sticky note and write down one thing you're grateful for.
2. Place the note somewhere you'll see it after waking up such as on a nightstand or bathroom mirror.
3. Try incorporating this into your daily routine to help train your brain to seek out the positive.

## PART 3: COPING STRATEGIES TO MANAGE FRUSTRATION AND IRRITABILITY

*You may feel frustrated when not meeting your goals. Irritability is a response to frustration and can feel like agitation.*

Watch Part 3: Frustration & Irritability on U of T Student Life [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [YouTube](#).

### Box Breathing

1. As you breathe through this exercise, imagine you're drawing a box.
2. Breathe in through your nose for a count (for example, 4 secs). Mentally draw a horizontal line from left to right.
3. Hold your breath gently for the same count (4 secs). Mentally draw a vertical line down.
4. Breathe out through your mouth for the same count (4 secs). Mentally draw a horizontal line from right to left.
5. Hold for the same count. Complete the box by mentally drawing a vertical line up to starting point.
6. Repeat the steps as needed.
7. If you have trouble holding your breath, try speeding the exercise up but keep the same count for each step.

### Brief and intense physical exercise

Decrease physical restlessness can spend conserved energy through brief and intense physical exercise (about 30 secs to a few minutes). Try anything that works for you such as jumping jacks, running around your block, dancing, lifting weights or fast-paced walking. Follow the video to learn two different brief and intense physical exercises. If you have any medical issues that would hinder physical activity, please consult your doctor first.

### Physical grounding activity

Grounding is any activity that brings you back to the present and can help you feel calmer. There are many different types of grounding techniques, including mental, physical and soothing. Physical grounding can help you feel less agitated by activating your senses through touch. For example, try squeezing a stress ball or use household items like a squishy ice or hot pack, a clean sponge or a bag of rice, beans or flour.

# RESOURCES

## Health & Wellness

Health & Wellness provides a range of health services for physical and mental health needs. Staff will guide you to the appropriate care based on your unique needs such as brief counselling, same-day single session counselling or coping skills workshops. Call 416-978-8030.

### Student Mental Health Web Portal

Find the mental health supports you need. Explore the search and filter function to find a match for your needs with the types of services and resources available through U of T and community partners.

### COVID-19 Information for University of Toronto Students

Find information for U of T students regarding the University's responses and actions related to COVID-19.

### U of T Student Life App

Access a directory of student support services and campus resources by downloading the Student Life app on [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#).

### U of T My Student Support Program (U of T My SSP)

U of T My SSP is a service that provides immediate and ongoing confidential, 24-hour counselling support for any school, health or general life concern. Ongoing support is available in over 146 languages. Access counsellors any time by phone or on the app. Call 1-844-451-9700 (Outside of North America, call 001-416-380-6578) or download My SSP app on [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#).

### Health & Wellness Peer Support Program

If you're struggling and would like to speak to a peer, the drop-in virtual peer-support program will connect you with a trained peer for a one-one-one, non-judgmental and confidential chat.

## Navi: Your mental health wayfinder

Navi is an anonymous, virtual, chat-based informational tool that can help you navigate U of T mental health resources and make decisions about seeking appropriate supports.

## U of T Campus Safety App

The tri-campus U of T Campus Safety App is integrated with U of T's safety and security systems to deliver real-time assistance to all campus members. It provides campus safety alerts and immediate access to safety resources and supports like TravelSafer, on-campus emergency contacts, Mobile Bluelight and Live Chat with Campus Police. Download U of T Campus Safety app on [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play Store](#).

## STAY INFORMED

Subscribe to the [Health & Wellness newsletter](#). Receive student-centric, St. George campus Health & Wellness news, information and updates on a bi-weekly basis.

Join the [UTSG Health & Wellness – Health Promotion Facebook group](#) to stay updated on upcoming workshops and view student posts on all things health and wellness.

Check out the Health & Wellness event calendar on [CLNx](#) for upcoming workshops.