

## Reentry Anxiety: 7 Ways to Deal With Stress About Post-Pandemic Life

Article adapted from <https://www.self.com/story/re-entry-anxiety-covid>

### 1. Focus on what's in your control.

Often when people feel anxious it's because they're feeling a high level of uncertainty about the things that are out of their control. So it's important to remind yourself of what you actually can control about a particularly stressful situation.

If you're planning to meet up with friends for the first time in a while, start by writing a list of the relevant factors that you have control over, such as getting your vaccine (or trying to as soon as possible, depending on your local rollout), social distancing, holding the gathering outside, and wearing masks. This will help you recognize what areas of your life you can focus on.

Another way to deal with that uncertainty is to think back to uncertain times in your past (like, say, when you first started lockdown). It'll remind you you've been resilient before—and that you can rely on the same resilience now.

### 2. Make a bucket list of the things you're excited to do again.

Creating a post-pandemic bucket list is a way to shift your thinking from what you're anxious about in the future to the positive experiences that could be waiting for you, creating a sense of hope and optimism in the process.

Your bucket list doesn't necessarily have to be extravagant or adventurous; it could be just as fun to list the doctor's office visits, haircuts, and nail salon appointments you've put off during the pandemic as it might be to come up with all the places you'd like to travel when it's safe to do so. The point is to push yourself to realize

that there will soon be new possibilities for joy and, yes, some normalcy.

### 3. Accept whatever you're feeling.

You might be excited to reenter the world, perhaps with new goals and a new perspective on life, while still mourning a loss due to COVID-19. It might be stressful to realize you have those seemingly incongruent emotions, but it's totally normal and it's important to let yourself feel everything. The key thing to remember is to go easy on yourself, and be accepting and compassionate of the things you're feeling.

### 4. Reintroduce activities slowly.

After being cooped up in our homes for so long, you may feel like you never want to take your freedom for granted again. It might be tempting to plan a get-together, a restaurant outing, and a road trip all in one week.

But you may want to hold off on making too many plans too fast.

Instead, take things slowly. Ease into new activities by seeing one friend at a time or planning shorter local trips (if it's safe in your area). Be gentle with reintegrating into society or you'll risk burning yourself out by over-committing to everything all at once.



### 5. Stay informed, but disconnect when you need to.

Staying informed is important, especially when it comes to updates in your community that will help you safely start doing more in the world again. But being too plugged in to the news or social media can contribute to anxiety, depression, and general stress.

That's why it's a good idea to notice when your doom-scrolling is no longer productive—and to start to step back. You can filter the information you take in by limiting the time you spend scrolling on social media, getting your information from only reliable news sources (rather than your Instagram feed), and remembering to take time away from screens can help ease some of the anxiety about what's to come.



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## 6. Accept that your life may have changed quite a bit during the pandemic.

You may be coming out of lockdown with your life—your body, your job, your relationship—seriously different than when you entered it, and that could be contributing to the anxiety you feel. But accepting that reality, and the idea that things may never return to how they used to be, is crucial.

When you accept your reality, it will be easier to take control and plan your next steps intentionally. That understanding will also help you remember that, over time, the anxiety that comes with reintegration will lessen.

## 7. Reach out for help if you need to.

If you've tried to manage your anxiety but find you're still not making progress, it might be time to evaluate how severe your anxiety really is and possibly work with a mental health professional.

If your anxiety is beginning to affect your work life or your relationships with friends, family, or romantic partners, those are signs that it's time to chat with a professional. And if you find that you're experiencing physical symptoms, such as headaches, tightness or tension in your neck and shoulders, stomach aches, or difficulty sleeping or concentration, those are also signs that it's time to seek help from a mental health professional.

Getting back into the world may seem like just as big of a life-changing transition as it was to switch to remote work, hold all your weekend chats over Zoom, and stock up on face masks. While some people may find it unbelievably exciting, others are likely finding the idea of reentering society to be quite stressful or maybe both. Whatever you're feeling, it's important to acknowledge and accept where you're at and, if needed, find some productive ways to feel comfortable safely returning to your pre-pandemic activities.

## Why a Bucket List Might Help You Prepare for Post-Pandemic Life

<https://www.self.com/story/bucket-list>

Whether we talk about grief, coronavirus symptoms, economic fallout, or isolation, the last year has been a kaleidoscope of crisis. If thinking about the future feels overwhelming, a bucket list—which is essentially a running tally of things you'd like to do when it's safe to do

them—is probably the furthest thing from your mind.

Lately, you might've experienced a bit of hope. Over 95 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These numbers, along with Instagram vaccine selfies, might have you thinking about an actual life post-lockdown. But in a year where personal goals were put on hold, "back to normal" could feel impossible, and returning to your "old life" might scare you.

There's so much uncertainty surrounding newfound hope. What will life look like after widespread vaccinations? Will old expectations return? What if the pre-pandemic normal kind of sucked? If you're dealing with grief or loss, you understand more than most that there is no "going back." Forward might seem scary, but a post-pandemic playlist makes it a little easier to face the future.

There is no therapy hack to erase the pain of the last year. A post-pandemic bucket list isn't a cure-all. But reminding yourself about parts of your life you can control might help manage anxieties about what you can't. And creating things to look forward to is crucial to cultivating a little more resilience.

My pandemic bucket list—filled with small items like "Get my hair done" and plans like "Go on a trip"—isn't overwhelmingly ambitious. It merely reminds me that I have some control over what happens next. And while thinking of salons and travel plans doesn't mean that I can grapple with all of the anxieties that keep me awake, the list reminds me, during a season of unfathomable loss, that there are still experiences to have (and revisit).



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A bucket list might sound like a trite solution to existential questions, but it isn't. Our lives are an amalgamation of plans, decisions, surprises, and relationships that pop up along the way. A post-pandemic bucket list is simply a vehicle for hope—and hope can make whatever comes next a little less scary.

## Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19/coping-with-covid-19>

It is normal to be feeling increased levels of stress and anxiety due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As social gathering restrictions and economic shutdowns have remained in place far longer than governments first anticipated, we understand that the activities and coping strategies you relied on to get through the past year may not be working as well as they used to. If you've been getting by but don't feel like things are getting better, try incorporating some of the coping tools on this site into your routine.

- Stress and Anxiety
- Loss, Grief and Healing
- Stigma and Prejudice
- Quarantine and Isolation



If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact 911 immediately or present to your nearest emergency department.

## Cope With Stress

<https://alis.alberta.ca/succeed-at-work/manage-challenges/cope-with-stress/>



How stressed are you? Do you know how to avoid or handle stress? Try these strategies to cope with the stress you face in your personal life and workplace.



A certain amount of stress is normal and necessary. It gets you going and helps you focus on the tasks at hand. But too much stress can undermine your performance, drain your energy, and affect your health.

### Feeling over-stressed?

People are funny. Sometimes they try to take on too much, do too much and be too much. When they do, they can become stressed out. Some common warning signs of too much stress are:

- Moodiness
- Loss of appetite
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Memory problems
- Concentration problems
- Anxious or racing thoughts

### Do you know your stress level?

Check your stress level by rating each situation listed below. Go with your first reaction to grade each answer.

**Always – 4**  
**Usually – 3**  
**Sometimes – 2**  
**Never – 1**

Do you:

- always have a lot to do and no time to do it?
- worry about what would happen if you ever had to take a day off sick?
- speed up the car to beat the red light?
- expect everyone, especially yourself, to do their very best all the time?
- consider small talk to be a waste of time?
- always know what time it is?
- feel sorry for yourself because of how hard you have to work?
- tend to be short-tempered with family or friends?
- have trouble dealing with a change in plans?
- find it hard to make time for exercise?
- need to win the games you play to enjoy them?
- feel guilty if you take time to just do nothing?
- have trouble saying “no” to requests for your time?
- keep your problems and worries to yourself?

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- tend not to ask for help?
- think of yourself as a go-getter?
- need to have other people admire you?
- find yourself still working when everyone else has gone home?
- always have deadlines for tasks?
- have almost no time for your hobbies or yourself?

### Total Scoring

Total your score and rate yourself. If your total was:

- 20–30: A little more positive stress in your life could help you achieve the things you want.
- 31–50: You have a good balance between handling stress and avoiding it. You're managing your stress.
- 51–60: You could be dealing with one or more stress-related problems.
- 60–plus: Stress alert! It's time to take positive actions to manage your stress.

## Tips for reducing stress

Try these strategies to limit stress in your life:

- Take one thing at a time and one day at a time. There's a limit to how much you can do. Set priorities. When you have many tasks and responsibilities, concentrate on the one thing you need to do now and put the others aside until later.
- Practise positive self-talk. Rephrase negative thoughts in positive ways. For example, say:
  - "I succeed at many things" instead of "I'm a failure."
  - "I'm doing my best to prepare" instead of "I will never be ready in time."
  - "I handle myself with confidence" instead of "I'm going to fall apart."
- Picture yourself coping well with stressful situations. Many athletes use this method, called visioning or imaging, to prepare for games or races.
- Laugh it off. Spend time with fun people in fun situations. Watch funny movies or television shows. Read books that make you chuckle. Play with a pet or a young child. Laughing releases tensions and reverses the physical effects of stress on your body.
- Do something creative for yourself. Enjoy a hobby that will keep your hands busy and absorb your at-



tention for a while. Garden, paint ceramics, create a scrapbook, draw, doodle, or work with wood and other natural materials.

- Use proven methods to reduce your stress. Listening to music, breathing deeply, or exercising are effective ways to lower stress levels. Or you may want to try more formal therapies, like progressive relaxation, positive visualization, yoga, or mindfulness meditation. Try an online tutorial, find a program in your community, or ask your supervisor or human resources to suggest a program.
- Seek fulfillment outside your work. Build resistance to stress by taking part in other interests and activities that energize you.
- Maintain a balanced lifestyle. See if you feel less stress when you share time with family and friends, get enough rest, eat well, exercise regularly, contribute to the community and enjoy leisure activities.
- Talk to someone. Tell your story and fears to a person you feel comfortable with. Or call a help line. Or get it off your chest by writing it all down on paper, letting the words flow without stopping to check or edit. Look for ways to make changes and improvements.

## Mental Health Help Line

The Mental Help Line is a 24 hour, 7 day a week confidential service that provides support, information and referrals to Albertans experiencing mental health concerns.

1-877-303-2642

(Toll free)



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