

# Promoting Physical and Emotional Comfort During COVID-19

Treating common reasons for distress experienced by dialysis patients or their families

Supportive Strategies for Kidney Care Community During COVID-19: Communication Series #2 from



[nursing.gwu.edu/pathways-project](https://nursing.gwu.edu/pathways-project)



[kidneysupportivecare.org](https://kidneysupportivecare.org)

# How to promote physical and emotional comfort during COVID-19

Treating common reasons for  
distress experienced by  
patients on dialysis or their  
families



Two topics:

Physical symptoms

Emotional distress

# SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019

Patients with COVID-19 have experienced mild to severe respiratory illness.

Symptoms\* can include

FEVER



COUGH



\*Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.

SHORTNESS OF BREATH



Seek medical advice if you develop symptoms, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.



[cdc.gov/COVID19-symptoms](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID19-symptoms)



## Treatment of COVID-19 Symptoms in Patients with ESRD

### Cough

- Opioids are most effective
- Titrate low dose opioids\*
  - Oxycodone 2.5-5 mg po q4h prn cough or
  - Hydromorphone 0.5-2 mg po q4h prn cough

### Dyspnea

- Upright posture
- Oxygen
- Fan blowing gently across the face
- Titrate low dose opioids\*
  - Oxycodone 2.5-5 mg po q4h prn SOB or
  - Hydromorphone 0.5-2 mg po q4h prn SOB

### Fever

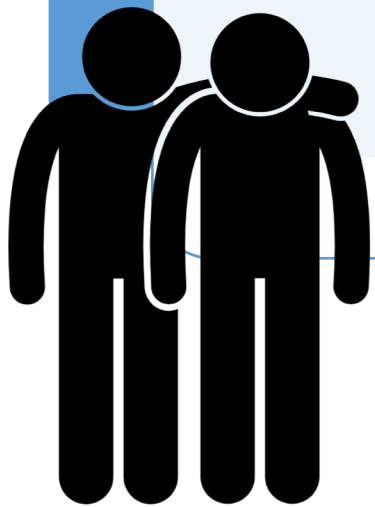
- Acetaminophen 650 mg po q4h prn fever
- NSAIDs not recommended-may aggravate infection
- Steroids not recommended-may aggravate infection

\*start senna 1-2 tabs po BID to avoid constipation

Detailed guidelines for symptom treatment in ESKD:  
<https://www.ckmcare.com/InformationRows/PracSymptoms>

Emotional reactions to COVID-19  
might include:

Grief &  
Anticipatory  
Grief



Anxiety



# Grief and Anticipatory Grief

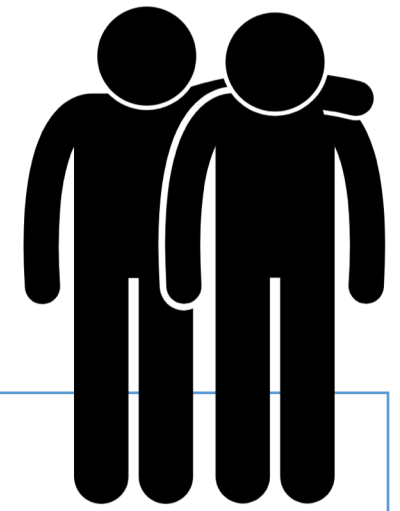
“Many people across the world are experiencing a form of grief right now, either in that they are grieving what they have lost (normal life) or they are worried about losing someone close to them. Grief can make us sad, distracted, unfocused, anxious and sleepless. I’ve been concerned about you. How are you doing?”

You may be **grieving** what you have lost.

Loss of a “normal” life when you can be with friends, go on vacation, sleep, run errands without fear, go to work, have financial security, space and independence.

You may be anticipating losing something in the future (Anticipatory Grief).

Grieving what you think you will lose in the future (job, loved ones, security, housing)



# Interventions for Grief

Allow and accept the grief.

- Pushing away negative emotions can intensify them.

Call on the wisdom in art, music, literature, and religion.

- Humans have dealt with death and grief throughout history. There is comfort and inspiration to be found in works of art, culture and religious or spiritual practice.

Do something for someone else.

- Make cards, drop groceries off on the front porch, cut flowers and leave them for a neighbor.

Take time every day to do something you enjoy.

- Death may be in front of us, but **we** are still living. Live in the present.

Enlist friends and your support network.

- Use phone, Skype, Facetime, or letters.

# Anxiety

“Feeling anxious is a common response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Anxiety can impact how we sleep, our concentration and make us scared. I’m wondering how this is impacting you?” PAUSE.  
“What have you found helps you feel less anxious?”

## Symptoms:

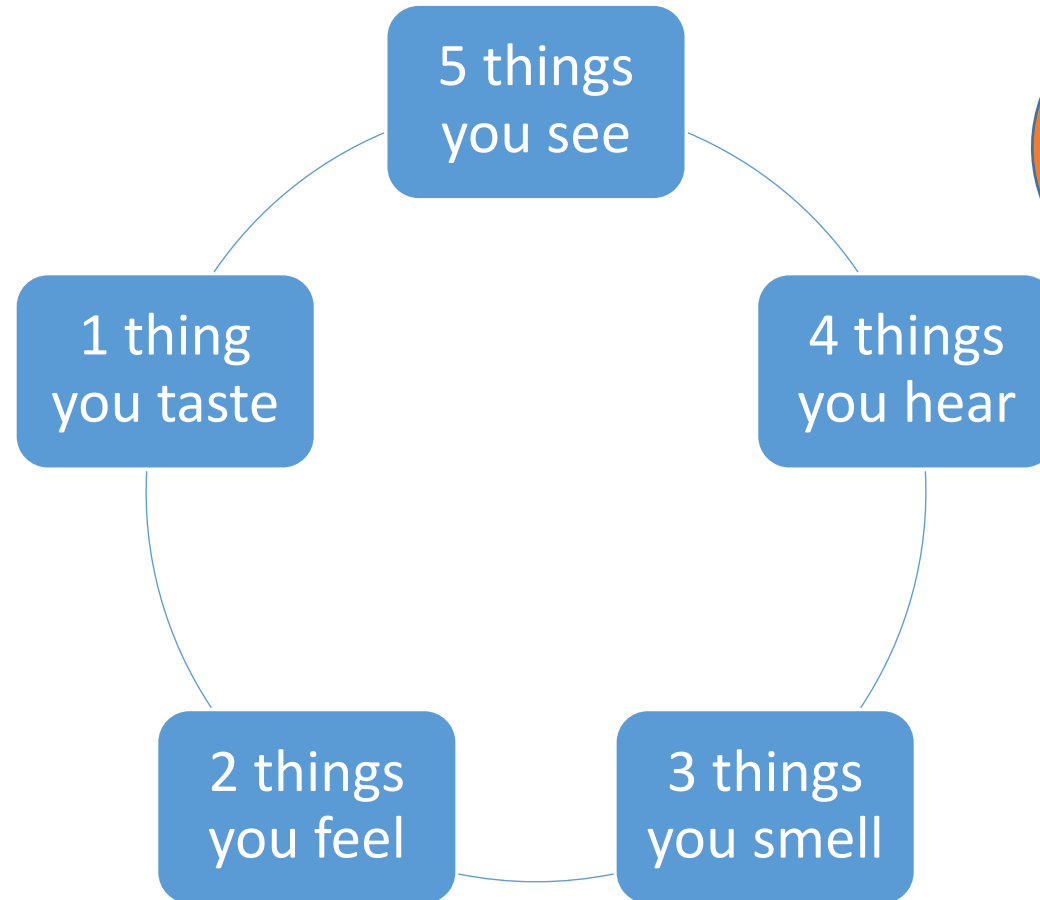
- Trouble sleeping
- Negative/obsessive thoughts: “This is horrible; how are we going to ever survive?”
- Fear about the future
- Trouble concentrating
- Restlessness

## Interventions for Anxiety:

- Limit news and social media. Find 1-2 news sources you like and review 1-2 times a day for 10-20 minutes.
- Avoid caffeine, drugs and alcohol.
- Exercise. Studies show that exercise helps increase coping capacity.
- Avoid any news before bed.
- Phone a friend.
- Establish a routine at home.

# Grounding Techniques: Close eyes and identify the following:

This technique can also be used for staff to use to get focused before a difficult patient encounter.



“I learned about a quick technique that helps people when they are feeling anxious or panicked. Would you like to hear about it (or do it with me)?”

Relaxation Techniques Video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHpTR2wRc8c>



# Empowering Patients to Ask for Difficult Information

- Patients are often afraid to ask for information about difficult topics. Patients often believe that the healthcare provider will give that information to them unprompted.

“I’m hearing a lot of people have fears related to COVID-19 and their health. I am wondering about you?” PAUSE.

“Sometimes it can be hard for patients to ask their doctor or nurse questions about their health. I want to make you comfortable asking me anything. I might not know the answer, but I will try to find out.” PAUSE.

“I’m worried that if I get this virus, there won’t be a ventilator to help me.”

Pointers:

- Honesty can create trustworthiness and alleviate anxiety.
- Providing too much information can be overwhelming, so individualize your response based on the patient. Go slow and be gentle.
- If patient shows emotional distress, ease off, and focus on patient strengths: “It is brave of you to share your concerns with me.” “You are doing everything you can to take care of yourself and family right now.”

“You care about your health and you are scared you won’t have help when you are suffering.”

PAUSE.

“I don’t have the answers and can’t predict the future, but here is what I can tell you. Our staff is committed to providing you the best care we can. Our team and the hospital team have been trained on how to make sure patients are as comfortable as possible through this.”

# Assertively asking for help when on dialysis

- You are your best advocate!
- It is important to be confident in asserting your needs to staff.
- Assertive communication is **HARD**, but important.
  - **H**onest
  - **A**ppropriate
  - **R**espectful
  - **D**irect



I feel X	When you do Y	In situation Z	And I would like
I feel anxious	when the staff don't wear masks	when they are cannulating me and sneezing.	I would like it if staff would wear masks all the time.
I feel upset	when I see other patients	that are coming into dialysis sick.	I would like it if there was a rule about dialyzing when sick.

Hunter, C. L., Goodie, J. L., Oordt, M. S., & Dobmeyer, A. C. (2009). *Integrated behavioral health in primary care: Step-by-step guidance for assessment and intervention*. American Psychological Association.

Let us know what other communication and emotional dilemmas you are facing during COVID-19 Pandemic

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<http://go.gwu.edu/communicationpromotingcomfort>