



## Coping with the pandemic; staying healthy in times of great uncertainty

By Dr. Delia Roberts

COVID-19 is like nothing we have come across before. It has affected every aspect of our lives, from work to leisure activities, from relationships with family and friends, to our children's education. Even the most basic tasks like shopping for groceries or filling up the gas tank can be unnerving and feel unsafe. None of us could have imagined that we would be facing uncertainty anything like what this pandemic has created. And while here in BC we have managed to keep the pandemic relatively at bay, just a short distance away across the US border, death rates from the virus have reached almost one American every minute!

**All this uncertainty adds up and can affect our health in more ways than one.**

Uncertainty is not unusual in the forest industry. The economic and political ups and downs of harvesting, processing, exporting and preserving BC forests have always presented challenges. So why has everything been more difficult this year? For many, the effects of the pandemic have tipped the scale to the point that we feel overwhelmed and out of control.

Too much stress is never a good thing, but difficult times can also present an opportunity. With the fast pace of normal life, it's often hard to find the time and energy to focus inward and work on our perspective. Yet, most of us can benefit from developing healthy ways of dealing with the anxiety, fear, anger and sadness that can accompany uncertainty. And the great advantage of building those skills is they can be used anytime, anywhere, whether the stress is financial, work-related, personal, driven by poor health or stems from COVID-19.

**Reducing uncertainty in uncertain times: Understand the situation.**

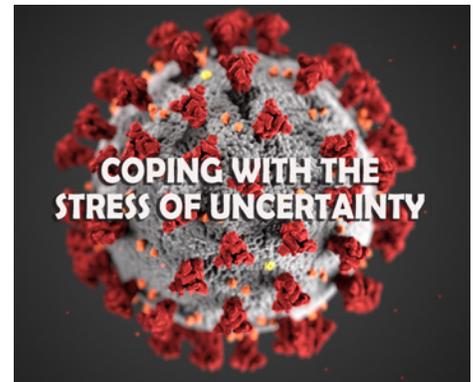
One of the best ways to reduce uncertainty is to seek-out high-quality information about the situation to make good decisions about how to react to the world around you. But we have to be careful about where we get our 'facts',

especially when using social media or searching the Internet. Unfortunately, anyone can create a website, which can sometimes make it difficult to determine whether the information is valid or not. Even sources we normally rely on, like the news, can be distorted these days. When searching for medically-related information, such as how COVID-19 is transmitted, how to protect yourself and your family from catching the virus, how serious the disease actually is and whether or not a safe vaccine is available, websites like the [BC Ministry of Health](#), the [BC Centre for Disease Control \(BC CDC\)](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) can be relied upon to present solid, science-based information. If your stress is work-related, talk to your manager. It's much better to know the real situation rather than to rely on rumours. For information about childcare, schools and other community resources, check with your local council, school board or BC government websites.

**Reducing uncertainty in uncertain times: Gaining control.**

Once you have good quality information, you can make a plan of action. It really helps to break the big problem down into small pieces. You most likely won't be able to solve it all at once, but if you can find even a small part that you can act on, you can gain some control. Managing uncertainty is about finding these small measures where you can take positive action. You can't control the economy, world politics, the decisions of your young adult children or other people from spreading COVID-19, but you can control your own behavior. Choose to follow social distancing rules, wear a mask and wash your hands. These things will have an impact in not only reducing your risk of catching COVID-19, but also support your community by reducing the risk of transmitting the disease.

Another great place to gain control is choosing to eat a healthy diet, getting some exercise at least 3 times/week and building good sleep habits. Though



it might be satisfying in the short term, excessive junk food, bingeing on video games or TV, and using alcohol, recreational drugs and tobacco/nicotine will only provide very short-term distraction and can damage your health in the long run. Instead, focusing on keeping yourself physically and mentally healthy will increase your reserve to deal with stressful situations in a positive way. For more information on each of these topics, check out the new [Healthy Worker series](#), past [FSN issues](#) and the other resources available on the [BCFSC website](#). You will find up-to-date quality information on diet, physical activity and many other health-related topics relevant to forestry workers.

If you've been laid off, are working from home, or have lost your usual childcare, the loss of the regular routine can be very undermining. One way to regain some control is to set up a schedule so your day has some structure. Planning your week with time set aside each day for chores, leisure, learning, job hunting, exercise and so on, helps maintain a feeling of accomplishment and being able to influence what is happening in your life.

**Mental Health Check-up**

Mental health is greatly affected by increased uncertainty, even for people who are used to the normal ups and downs life throws at them. It's also a topic that remains sensitive and many people are still uncomfortable talking about feeling sad or anxious or angry. The isolating conditions created by COVID-19 social distancing rules have made this much worse. You might normally live or work in the bush alone but taking away the small social interactions that occur on a daily basis, let alone being able to see and hug loved ones and

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good friends, has made it much harder to process the uncertainty and keep a balanced perspective. Thoughts seem to get trapped inside our heads and without any of the usual interactions with people, even small problems can circle round and round until they become overwhelming.

It's extremely important to recognize that you may not be as resilient as usual. Take action against isolation by deliberately reaching out to friends and family when you are feeling down, anxious, afraid or angry. You'll most certainly find that you are not alone, and that others are also feeling similarly challenged. Sharing your feelings can help reduce anxiety and break up negative thought cycles. And offering support to others is a great way to feel strong and capable and this giving will come back to you tenfold.

There are times when it is necessary to work with a professional but there are many good resources available to help you develop good skills for managing anxiety. Here are a few suggestions that can help you reduce the amount of anxiety that you experience due to COVID-19.

- Stay connected while self-isolating. There are many ways to connect including phone, video conferencing, email and face-to-face at a distance.

When you can, hug those who are in your close circle. Take time to check in with people you know who live alone and might be more isolated.

- The opposite can be true too. With kids and a partner at home all day, it may be important to find ways to create space from those you live with. Too little room can also increase anxiety and make it difficult to maintain positive relationships. Go for a walk, head to the garage, sit in your car, find a secluded corner or even a closet where you can retreat for a bit of personal time.
- Consider your coping mechanisms. If you need to stop worrying about something that you can't directly affect, talk it out with a friend, put it down on paper, meditate, get some exercise, do some chores, read a book or watch a show (for no more than an hour). If you've found yourself turning to alcohol, recreational drugs or tobacco, [contact one of the help lines available 24/7](#), free of charge. Drugs and alcohol are not solutions, they build dependency and create much larger problems with more serious consequences than the problems they seem to provide an escape from.
- Consider what is really important. Times of uncertainty are good times to think about what really has value to you. How is your health and the health of

people who are important to you? If you have had to cancel your vacation plans, determine which experiences are important to you and whether you create them closer to home. Sometimes social media and society can pressure us into thinking that we actually have to have much more than we actually need or even want. This might be a time to revisit which values are truly important to you and seek out ways to live out those values.

The changes that have occurred because of the pandemic reach every aspect of society. It's doubtful that our lives will ever go back to the way things were; there are many challenges yet to come. Take care of yourself and those around you; together we can get through these difficult times, and hopefully, come out the other side stronger, more resilient and if not better, then at least not seriously damaged by the effects of COVID-19.

- [BCFSC Covid-19 Resources](#)
- [COVID-19 – Psychological Support Toolkit for Workers and Employers](#)
- [Managing COVID-19 Stress, Anxiety and Depression](#)
- [BC CDC](#)
- [Free on-line anxiety management program](#) from Anxiety Canada. Based on well-established Cognitive Based Therapy techniques. 🧠



## Depression: Facing It Head On

By Martin Ridgway,  
Supervisor, SAFE Companies Quality Assurance

My name is Martin and I have depression.

There. I said it out loud. It was scary to say. But it shouldn't be. I don't know why it's different than saying I was doing a stupid stunt and broke my leg, but it is. I'm still me either way.

Late last year, I officially received my diagnosis, but looking back I had symptoms for over a decade. Those of you who have dealt with me are probably very surprised to know I have depression and take meds for it. A few of you are probably thinking it explains my sense of humour. I've been thinking about writing this for four months, but now, in light of everything going on in the world, I felt it was finally time.

What is depression? Well, basically my brain doesn't make a particular chemical (serotonin) as quickly as it needs to, so things don't work as smoothly as they should. It's sort of like diabetes in a way, but for the brain. To help even out their insulin levels, a diabetic person may take several insulin shots a day that vary each time depending on how much and what they eat. For me, I just need to take one small pill daily at roughly the same time each day. It sounds easy when you look at it that way, and it is. Except,

until you start taking the pill, or doing any other treatment, EVERYTHING is hard. Brushing your teeth, explaining why your idea is good or even adjusting the car seat from the last person can be a problem.

Some people find counselling works best for them over medication and some need both. For me, medication worked better but counselling helped in the beginning. You will carve out your own path and might have a different journey from me because your brain is not my brain.

So why am I sharing this with everyone? I want one person to read this and see themselves or someone they care about. Talk to your doctor, call the nurse, connect with your Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP), tell anyone you trust that you think you might be depressed and would like some help to not feel so lousy all the time. It was both the hardest and the easiest thing I ever did.

Then, when you get through to the far side, and you'll know it when you get there, try to help someone else through too. Someone helped me and now it's my turn. Here is a list of resources:

- [MindHealthBC](#)
- [Bounce Back](#)
- [Mental Health Digital Hub](#)
- [Heads Up Guys](#) 🧠