

### Coronavirus / Pandemic Fatigue / Caution Fatigue

Fatigue at the end of a good day of working, play and socializing, is something we appreciate. We have been productive, enjoyed ourselves and look forward to a good night of sleep.

Another kind of fatigue some people experience is the fatigue because many are slow to overcome having Covid-19. It's a key symptom of the virus. And it's part of the problem people have as they struggle to recover. It can go on a long time, as there are a number of longer term issues for some of the people who have the virus.

But we are becoming aware of another kind of fatigue. It's simply being tired of how the world has changed, and what we are going through. With living as long as we have with the virus, and the situation not seeming to come to an end, no light at the end of the tunnel, it's understandable that some people are getting tired of taking the precautions necessary. Many have a form of **burnout** or **stress** or **safety fatigue** as some call it.

Or as Jacqueline Gollan, a clinical psychologist at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, says, slipping vigilance may be an example of "**caution fatigue**," a term she coined. Gollan said she and colleagues first noticed this relaxation of precautions in people with depression, before the coronavirus pandemic began.

With wearing face masks in public, maintaining physical distancing, washing hands frequently, and sanitizing what we buy, and so on, these extra habits in our routines can be overwhelming. Sustained change is hard. Especially when no one around us is sick. It feels strange to organize our lives around a risk that doesn't seem real.

Carol Parish, says, "Right now, most people are still removed from the consequences of getting COVID-19. The risk might not feel real to them if they don't know anyone who's sick with COVID-19. And," she adds, "unfortunately, some people get a bit of a thrill from doing something risky and escaping consequences."

So we have a new challenge in how to love our neighbors. This requires regular focus to protect our loved ones, neighbors, and ourselves. But it's hard to keep focus, stay consistent, and not caught up in fears. So consider ways to help yourself. We see this among ourselves and around the world today.

Here are some articles about this that offer a variety of perspectives. Just read one a day. And you may have other perspectives that you may want to share.

### Canadians dealing with 'COVID fatigue' as pandemic drags on, says psychologist

By Sam Thompson Global News

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A Winnipeg psychologist says **trust** can affect COVID-19 rates -- especially when people trust friends and family to take the same precautions they do.

The rising number of coronavirus cases in Manitoba and other parts of the country could be due to what one psychologist describes as “**COVID fatigue.**”

Dr. Michael Wohl, a former Winnipegger currently working as a psychology professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, told 680 CJOB that people are social animals, and physical distancing, after a prolonged period, goes against our basic instincts.

“When Manitobans look around and see others gathering in parks, playing sports — they hear about backyard parties and they see people at patios on Corydon — it sets up a perceived norm for behaviours,” he said.

“We find it hard not to join in the fun.”

“According to prospect theory, there’s a diminishing sensitivity as numbers increase,” Wohl said.

“When we first heard the number of COVID cases increasing from 5 to 10, it felt more than when we heard the numbers had increased from 100 to 105.”

Wohl recently co-authored a scientific study about COVID-19 death rates in 84 countries around the world, and found that trust plays a part in coronavirus death rates.

People in societies that are more civically engaged and trusting of state institutions were more likely to follow public health advice, like wearing masks to protect themselves and others.

Coronavirus: Increased number of COVID-19 cases in Manitoba linked to Winnipeg bars and restaurants, health official says.

Trust, however, can also have a negative impact, if you assume people around you are taking the same precautions you are when it comes to the virus, he said.

“You can’t see COVID-19, and trusting that others are engaging in behaviours that reduce the risk of transmission may actually increase virus transmission,” he said.

“A human instinct is to huddle in our social groups, which is problematic when you need people to practice physical distancing.”

Manitoba saw its 19th COVID-19-related death Thursday as cases continue to rise.

The province’s chief public health officer, Dr. Brent Roussin, said Manitobans need to be conscientious of how many people they come into contact with, especially when symptomatic — as in the case of one person who visited a bar while symptomatic and came into contact with 36 different people.

“We see these types of issues, we know what to do about it. We know that we should be decreasing our time in public spaces, crowded spaces and reducing prolonged contact,” he said.

“We certainly shouldn’t be out when we’re symptomatic.”

# Managing COVID Fatigue is Crucial to Our Health and Wellbeing During the Pandemic

UW Health COVID-19 Resources Emily Kumlien

Madison, Wisconsin - Compounded stress and exhaustion from worrying about the coronavirus is leading to "**COVID Fatigue**," a shorthand way of talking about an overall sense of exhaustion based on the combination of challenges people are facing during the pandemic.

As a result, health care providers are seeing an increase in people who are feeling defeated, burned out and engaging in risky behaviors that can increase the spread of the coronavirus. Patients are also reporting higher levels of depression, anxiety, and alcohol and drug dependency as the pandemic persists. As a result, the next challenge is to flatten the mental health curve.

UW Health psychologist Shilagh Mirgain says that once a person recognizes that they are experiencing the symptoms of COVID Fatigue there are number of helpful tips and behavioral changes that they can do to benefit their mental health by better managing the uncertainty of these times. The following are the four main areas of COVID Fatigue and some coping mechanisms for each one:

- Change fatigue and uncertainty burnout
  - Radical acceptance that life will continue to be difficult for a while.
  - Find the silver lining.
  - Look for activities new and old that continue to fulfill you.
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- Depleted surge capacity.
  - "Take 5" mindfulness practice to recharge.
  - Expect less from yourself - cut yourself some slack and give yourself some grace.
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- Zoom burnout
  - 20-20-20 rule (For every 20 minutes you are looking at a screen, look away from the screen and focus on a spot 20 feet away for 20 seconds).
  - Consider getting blue light blocking glasses.
  - Use transitions well (getting up and walking for two minutes every hour can help reverse the negative health effects from prolonged sitting. Also consider other formats for meetings, such as a telephone call or shorter meeting where you do some of the work by e-mail).
  - Choose to move: Make physical activity a priority.
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- "Doom scrolling," or staying glued to electronic devices to find out information on the disasters and stressors that face our country.
  - Limit how much social media you are exposed to.
  - Be mindful of the type of news you are consuming.

## Why people are taking more coronavirus risks as the pandemic drags on

Health

By — *Fedor Kossakovski*

July 29, 2020 4:33 PM EDT

In the last four months, the coronavirus has not changed its tactics, but we humans in the United States (or anywhere in the world, including Canada) have. Think back to late March, when large-scale lockdowns began in earnest in many parts of the country. What were your feelings about the COVID-19 pandemic back then? Were you worried about touching your groceries or too cautious to leave the house, or washing your hands more than you have in your entire life? Have you kept up the same vigilance, amid the balmy summer weather and calls to reopen schools?

Though there generally is adherence to public health guidelines like mask-wearing in an effort to suppress the spread of COVID-19, there are indications the perception of risk may be changing. The number of people who say they always wear masks in public has gone down slightly recently in countries like Spain, the United Kingdom, France and the U.S., according to polling by market research company YouGov.

And even as COVID-19 cases are surging to new heights across the U.S., (and Canada) it makes sense that people are likely to be more lax in their precautions than during the early days of the crisis, experts in risk perception say.

“We are always more frightened by a risk when it’s new,” said David Ropeik, an author and consultant who used to teach risk communication at Harvard University. “There’s a new fear that’s creeping up against and counterbalancing our fear of the disease, and it is fear or lack of control over our lives and our future.”

Nowadays, the main fear is the coronavirus, and people are grappling with how to put social distancing into practice on a daily basis. “If you think about the decisions people are making in their lives, much of our population has become intuitive epidemiologists,” said Baruch Fischhoff, a psychologist at Carnegie Mellon University.

In 2015, Fischhoff and colleagues surveyed people in the U.S. about their perception and understanding of the Ebola virus. “We asked people what ‘R-naught’ was, which we described in lay terms – for each person who gets the disease, how many people will catch it from them – and people gave us a quite good, reasonable estimate.”

“What the research finds is that if you get people’s attention and the information is presented clearly, people do pretty well” at evaluating risk, Fischhoff said.

People want to feel like they understand a hazardous, complicated situation such as an outbreak, Fischhoff contends, so they build mental models based on information they consume and have access to, and then make decisions based on how they perceive the models to work. “They look for quantitative estimates if they can conceivably find them,” Fischhoff said. Then people essentially gamble with that knowledge.

Ropeik highlights a different way of thinking about how people respond to coronavirus risks — that emotional responses are much more important when perceiving risk. “A healthy brain, by its architecture and chemistry, guarantees that our first reaction to any input, whether it’s an external

stimulus or a memory from inside the brain, will be with emotion first and reason second,” Ropeik said.

Citing the work of neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, Ropeik said that perceived stimuli are processed by the amygdala, a part of the brain that deals in part with emotion, before they are routed to the prefrontal cortex, the seat of higher-order thinking and decision-making in the brain. The amygdala also triggers the fight or flight response, meaning fear can take hold before any deliberate thinking has taken place. “The brain gives way more emphasis to emotion than reason,” Ropeik said.

### **Caution: Fatigue**

To Jacqueline Gollan, a clinical psychologist at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, slipping vigilance may be an example of “caution fatigue,” a term she coined. Gollan said she and colleagues first noticed this relaxation of precautions in people with depression, before the coronavirus pandemic began.

“We were seeing that a lot of patients who were suffering from depression were showing a lot of difficulty in moderating their exposure to really aversive situations,” Gollan said. “It was almost as though they just were ignoring a lot of the risk around them.” Gollan said her research found some of these patients were struggling with self-control and are less able to avoid risky situations like staying at a toxic work environment and drinking alcohol.

“With the pandemic, in general, I think it’s that people are just not interested or don’t have the energy to pay attention to the safety guidelines because they’re tired,” Gollan said. “They have mental or physical fatigue from continually dealing with the stressful situations around them. Our brains biologically adjust to alarms that are around us because it helps reduce our sense of stress, and so we will take longer to respond and we’ll start to ignore warnings.”

It’s a lot of psychological work to be making important decisions about your health and safety, and Fischhoff agrees that there is likely some aversion to that constant assessment.

There are other reasons for caution fatigue, Gollan said, like desensitization to the threat. But among the experts, the biggest point of agreement about why some people are relaxing their precautions was poor messaging around the risk itself, especially here in the U.S.

“You could look at the rhetoric of [President Donald] Trump over the last few months and he has been repeatedly short term: ‘It’s going to disappear one day. It’s gonna go down to zero,’” said Jay Van Bavel, a psychologist and social neuroscientist at New York University. “Some people are frustrated. They weren’t given the leadership around the type of choices they would have to make for a long period of time.”

U.S. messaging on public health guidelines during the pandemic has been much more patchwork and contradictory than in countries such as Japan, which has created a campaign of easily understandable health guidelines that flow from the top levels of government and are adjusted to local needs. Different groups and levels of government work together, instead of undermining each other or sparring politically.

Van Bavel, with Anton Gollwitzer and other colleagues, has been investigating whether political partisanship correlates to adherence to social distancing, comparing smartphone geotracking data during stay-at-home orders with 2016 presidential election returns.

Ropeik thinks that calls in March to flatten the curve was an important short-term goal, but may have doused the sense of urgency that many felt early on. “The people who are doing the communicating well, like the World Health Organization, even they were focusing on the short term,” Ropeik said. “So when we achieved that, it’s like, ‘Well, we did what we were asked, it’s over.’ That’s poor risk management.”

So, what to do?

Gollan says she is planning more research into how people respond psychologically to the COVID-19 pandemic, but she and the others offered some key, actionable takeaways to help battle the stress now. “Develop a cornerstone habit and then continue to build on that,” Gollan said. “For example, leaving the mask on the handle of the interior of the front door of your place. Just leave it hanging there and grab it as you’re heading out the door.”

Don’t overload on information, Ropeik said. “That level of awareness biologically puts us in a fight or flight response. Biologically, that response includes chemicals in our body that make us more sensitive to any other information being potentially risky. Disproportionately, when we’re in a stressed situation, we tend to see the world is darker than it actually is. That’s not good for our health. Stay informed, but not probably as informed as you’re staying already. Give yourself a break from the fear.”

Fischhoff agreed: “The facts change very slowly. If you check the headlines once a day, you pretty much know all you need to know about the changes in the science.”

On the messaging side, leaders have to step up and deliver clear health messages effectively to various audiences, Van Bavel said. “Some things that Anthony Fauci has done, there was a period where he went on a lot of YouTube channels with influencers and talked to them about these issues,” Van Bavel said of Fauci, one of the country’s top public health experts. “That was a really smart way of getting to different audiences and deputizing those influencers to spread the message.”

## **Psychology of the next pandemic**

It’s never too soon to plan our response to the next pandemic, and to do so, it is important to understand how people think and act in the midst of an outbreak. In a matter of weeks earlier this spring, Van Bavel and colleagues pulled together a wide-ranging review of the current research, “Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response,” which was published in Nature Human Behavior at the end of April.

In working on that article, the team came across a paper in Science from 1919 titled “The Lessons of the Pandemic”. Van Bavel was struck by how the lessons from the pandemic of 1918 were still applicable today. “It was remarkable how on point it was,” Van Bavel said, particularly on how people are not aware of such threats, and the way avoiding other people goes against human nature.

The coronavirus we are battling now may be new, but human reactions to these types of risks are not. “They stand the test of time, and maybe in 100 years we’ll be looking back and people will be making the same mistakes,” Van Bavel said.