

# Intolerance of uncertainty in corona times

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Despite of many efforts done by humans, uncertainty is an always-present feature of our experience. The way that we deal with uncertainty differs and has relevant consequences on how we feel about our life. This has been studied by the concept of '*Intolerance of Uncertainty*'<sup>1</sup>. In simple(r) words, this refers to the upsetting and stressful reaction caused by the perception of not knowing what is going to happen. Take, for example, waiting for the results of a job interview: there's no certainty about what will be the outcome, and all you can do is wait. Some people find this more easy to tolerate than others. Difficulty tolerating uncertainty is highly common in people struggling with anxiety and/or depression.

Individuals who are *intolerant of uncertainty*:

- Find uncertainty stressful and upsetting.
- They believe that uncertainty is negative and should be avoided.
- Experience difficulties functioning in uncertainty-inducing situations.
- Tend to feel threatened in the face of uncertainty.
- Engage in futile attempts to control or eliminate uncertainty.



In this time of Corona-pandemic, we all could relate with the experience of uncertainties in life. “When is everything going to be back to normal?”, and “What if I got infected?” are examples of questions that we are all dealing with, and are difficult for all to some extent. And if you recognize yourself as being intolerant of uncertainty, or feel this way for the first time, you might feel overwhelmed, anxious, stressed or even afraid.

One of the things that comes along with uncertainty, is worry. Worrying is a two-sided coin and has to be well understood. On the one hand, it is a useful feeling because it helps us prepare and address problems. On the other hand worry itself creates distress, tension in our body, and loops in our thoughts, especially when your worry concerns things you cannot solve. And especially at this moment, there are many matters that, despite our efforts, we cannot solve. But the good news is: though you cannot influence the uncertainty of a situation, you can learn to regulate your worry.

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<sup>1</sup> For a scientific review in the topic:

Tanovic, E., Gee, D. G., & Joormann, J. (2018). *Intolerance of uncertainty: Neural and psychophysiological correlates of the perception of uncertainty as threatening*. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 60(January), 87–99.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2018.01.001>