



It is common knowledge that the Aviation industry has been severely impacted by the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Six months ago, our air traffic was busy, our industry was growing exponentially and the world was our oyster as prestigious international airlines were rushing to hire skilled pilots from all over the world. Overnight, COVID-19 pulled the rug out from beneath us and what seemed like an incredible future is now rigged with fear and uncertainty.

“How do I protect myself and my family?”, *“Will my company survive this?”*, *“Will I still have a job?”*, *“When will this end?”* and *“What will aviation look like post COVID-19?”* may be some of the questions plaguing your mind. As aviators we are trained to manage risk, but our skillset has not equipped us to manage the level of uncertainty we are currently facing. The **brain is created to anticipate and plan the future**. We therefore may experience **varying levels of stress, anxiety or depression** as our current reality of **consistent uncertainty is disrupting this process**.

How do I determine the difference between stress, anxiety and depression?

- **STRESS | ADVISORY** is a normal response to a threat/abnormal situation. It is our **fight or flight** response to an imminent/real threat. There is **good stress (eustress)**: our sense of arousal which motivates us to achieve our goals, and **bad stress (distress)**: when we experience emotions of fear and anxiety. We manage stress everyday as it is our reaction to immediate life events.
- **ANXIETY | MASTER CAUTION** is a **response of fear to a vague, unknown or perceived threat** that has not yet taken place. Anxiety manifests when we are **fearful of future events** and is associated with the **“what if”** scenarios we play out in our mind. The bigger the perceived negative impact of an event, the greater the anxiety we experience.
- **DEPRESSION | MASTER WARNING** is a psychological state of deep sadness, negativity and depressed mood. If depressive symptoms persist and interfere with daily functioning, a referral to a mental healthcare provider may be required. If left unchecked, **constant stress and anxiety could lead to depression**.

How do I recognise stress, anxiety and depression in myself or others? Symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression are indicated in three ways: **psychologically** (mind), **physically** (body) and **behaviourally** (what others may notice). You may be experiencing stress, anxiety or depression if you experience some of the following symptoms:

	STRESS	ANXIETY	DEPRESSION
PSYCHOLOGICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritation, Frustration, Moody • Feeling overwhelmed • Loss of control • Difficulty relaxing/quietening the mind • Avoiding Others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive Fear • Excessive Worry • Feeling tense, wound up and edgy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathy/lack of interest & enthusiasm • General discontent • Guilt, Hopelessness • Los of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy • Deep sadness
PHYSICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension and muscle pain • Headaches • Changes in Appetite • Disturbed Sleeping Patterns • Low immune system • Loss/low sexual desire • Excessive sweating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panic Attacks • Fatigue • Excessive Sweating • Racing Heartbeat • Hot/Cold Flushes • Trembling, tension & restlessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early awakening, excess sleepiness, insomnia, or restless sleep • Noticeable changes in appetite (weight loss/gain) • Fatigue
BEHAVIOURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procrastinating/avoiding responsibilities • Increased use of substances (alcohol/tobacco etc.) • Constant worrying • Disorganised behaviour & thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance of any situation that will cause anxiety e.g. conflict situation or people • Hypervigilance • Overthinking/excessively thinking about future events • Impaired concentration and attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social isolation/withdrawal • Excessive crying • Slowness in activity • Procrastination • Suicidal thoughts

You may have experienced symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression due to stressful life events professionally and personally. Simulator check rides, initial type ratings, extremely bad weather or aircraft maintenance faults may have increased your level of stress or even anxiety. Life changing events such as the loss of a close friend or family member, retrenchment or a painful break up may have left you feeling stressed, anxious or possibly depressed. It is normal to experience symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression from time to time, especially if they coincide with significant life events. **However, if you are experiencing these symptoms on a regular basis, for a prolonged period or if they start interfering with daily functioning**, it could be an indication that **your body is sending you a MASTER WARNING** signal. Therefore, the contributing factors of your stress, anxiety or depression need to be addressed.

How do I manage stress, anxiety and depression? Here are some possible guidelines:

1. **Be attentive to your emotions and allow yourself to go through them.** Emotions are similar to the ebb and flow of waves, feeling them allows them to pass. When you feel something, notice and identify it: **“I am angry, afraid, stressed, scared, and overwhelmed”** etc. Although painful, do not suppress or push your emotions away, it is normal to feel the way you feel during this time.
 - Suppressed or blocked emotions will well up in you like a volcano and eventually erupt.

- Instead of suppressing your emotions try opening up to someone you trust who can provide perspective and insight. Talking through how you feel with a trusted person in your life can release that emotion, provide insight and perspective and help you move forward.
- 2. Remember a challenging experience from your past and how you conquered it.** If you have done it once, you can do it again!
 - You are resilient, there have been times when you have had to face overwhelming circumstances and you overcame them. This means you have the ability to use your winning formula again.
 - We are trained to recall memory items! Recall the healthy coping mechanisms and resources you used in the past and make use of them again. For example, encouragement from family, friends or your religious community, professional coaching, counselling or psychological services.
 - 3. Use physical exercise to release the stress and tension.** Almost every mental health article is stressing the importance of physical exercise and activity at the moment. That is because the psychological benefits of exercise cannot be overemphasised right now.
 - Our level of physical activity is in our control and we are finally allowed to be active most of the day at a time convenient for us.
 - Go for a walk, jog or run on your own or with someone to clear your mind. Exercise releases chemicals in the brain which make us feel happy and act as a natural painkiller.
 - 4. Embrace healthy eating and sleeping habits.** The benefits of eating and sleeping well could have a significant positive impact on your mental and physical health.
 - Increase your vegetables and natural sugars and reduce artificial sugar and fat in your diet. You may benefit from consulting a medical practitioner if you are unsure about which diet is most suitable for you.
 - Train your body to sleep and wake up at the same time every day; a good amount of sleep regulates your mood, allows your body to release toxins and strengthens your immune system.
 - Avoid excessive consumption of substances such as alcohol, tobacco or other addictive substances.
 - 5. Spend time doing an activity you enjoy every day.** Give yourself permission to enjoy the little pleasures of life!
 - Watch a movie, listen to music, dance in your living room, laugh hysterically at a joke, call a close family member or friend, find something that gives you joy and do it!
 - Meditate, spend time in prayer or simply focus on breathing and try visualising positive images when you do this. Deep breathing has been scientifically proven to be calming.
 - 6. Be deliberate about what you watch and listen to.** Unfortunately, there is a lot of fake news making the rounds, as well as authentic news that does not benefit us in any way.
 - Ensure you are soliciting credible sources of information and limit your exposure to social media. Some of the news available makes us overly anxious rather than safety conscious.
 - It is important to be informed but it is toxic to obsess over things you cannot control.
 - 7. If you are feeling overwhelmed more days than not, seek professional help.** It is ok to admit to yourself that you need professional help. We have never experienced something of this magnitude before and unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures. Some of the signs that you may need to seek professional/skilled help include:
 - Suicidal thoughts or ideation
 - Persistence and interference of the symptoms (mentioned earlier) in your daily functioning
 - Frequent expressed concern from those closest to you.

Remember that you are not alone, as an aviation community we are weathering the storm together. To ensure we come out of the storm together please make use of MAYDAY-SA or other professional support services available to you such as:

Life Line: Free 24-hour confidential telephone counselling for crisis intervention: 0861 322 322 www.lifeline.co.za	SADAG: South African Depression and Anxiety Group ~ Helplines providing free telephonic counselling, information, referrals and resources 24 hours a day: 0800 21 22 23, 0800 70 80 90 or 0800 456 789
FAMSA: Families South Africa ~ Couple and Family related counselling (011) 975 7106/7 www.famsa.org.za	Suicide Helpline: 0800 567 567 www.sadag.org
SANCA: SA National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence 011 892 3829 or 076 5351701 (WhatsApp) www.sancanational.info	AA: Alcoholics Anonymous ~ National helpline: 0861 HELPAA (435 722) www.aasouthafrica.org.za
NA: Narcotics Anonymous ~ National 24-hour helpline: 083 900 MY NA (083 900 69 62)	
<i>You may ask your company who your employee wellness service provider is and contact them</i>	

Reference List:

1. Quabec. (2020). Stress, anxiety and depression associated with coronavirus COVID-19 disease. <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/stress-anxiety-and-depression-associated-with-the-coronavirus-covid-19-disease/>

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