

# News Release

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## **COPING WITH ANXIETY DURING HIGH RISK TERRORIST ALERTS Advice from the American Psychiatric Association**

Arlington, Va. - Fear and anxiety are normal human reactions to a perceived threat or danger. However, such uncertainty is manageable if people keep the threat in perspective, the American Psychiatric Association said today.

“The raised national terrorist threat index to ‘high risk’ provokes anxiety in all of us,” says Paul S. Appelbaum, M.D., APA President. “But knowledge and information based on facts can help us manage that understandable anxiety.”

APA offers the following advice on how to live with the fear and anxiety caused by the recent increased alert:

- *Educate yourself about the potential danger. Facts are frequently less frightening than rumors and myth.*
- *If television or other news reports significantly increase feelings of anxiety and helplessness, don't watch or read them; you don't need to know every last detail. Television news of violence can be frightening to children, especially when it is viewed repetitively.*
- *Find ways to distract yourself from thinking about the potential for harm. Get involved in an activity that you can control: work in the garden, clean the basement, do volunteer work, take up an old hobby, take a “time out” and go to the movies or a play.*
- *Take advantage of the weekends to refuel. A day or so away from normal routine—whether spent at home or on a weekend getaway—breaks the cycle of preoccupation with disaster.*
- *Talk about your anxiety with family or friends; avoid being alone.*
- *When you find yourself worrying about the unknown, mentally change the subject.*
- *Avoid or at least minimize alcohol and caffeine intake; caffeine can add to “the jitters,” and both disrupt sleep.*
- *Get regular exercise.*
- *If you smoke, don't increase your tobacco consumption. While it may seem to ease anxiety in the short run, increased smoking poses significant long-term health hazards.*

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- *If you are uncontrollably fearful and preoccupied with the threat of harm to the extent you cannot continue your daily activities, you should consider talking to your physician or a mental health professional. Symptoms that indicate a need for a medical evaluation include but are not limited to:*
  - *Changes in eating and sleeping habits;*
  - *Physical problems: stomach upsets, back and neck aches, headaches;*
  - *Inability to focus or concentrate on the task at hand;*
  - *Lack of interest in previously enjoyable activities; and*
  - *Extreme fear of leaving your home.*

**Note to Editors:** The National Partnership for Workplace Mental Health has available an emergency preparedness guide, *When Disaster Strikes: Managing Mental Health in the Workplace*. To access this free guide, please visit <http://www.workplacementalhealth.org>.

**The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose 37,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org).**

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