

When the quakes go on...and on....and on...

Strategies for self care when the after shocks keep coming and nothing is certain.

As the quakes continue unpredictably people of all ages have to endure them and manage anxiety and fear, as well as anger and frustration. The continuing tensions that are held in people's minds and bodies may lead to all sorts of symptoms that can be difficult, annoying or even scary to have to deal with.

Quake symptoms that Canterbury people are experiencing, both after earthquakes and in an ongoing way, include:

feeling faint **nauseous** being sick **shaking** **tingling**
clammy **dizzy** **very tearful or unable to cry at all**
breathlessness **hard to catch a deep breath** **diarrhoea**
panicky - panic attacks *feeling hot and cold* sweating
feeling like it's unreal and not really happening **forgetful** **disoriented**
headaches **chest pain** pre-existing conditions worsen (e.g. asthma)
jumpy **on alert all the time** body aches **falling ill more often**
can't focus on anything unable to take information in
hard to think properly **distracted** **times of being confused**
tingling fingers **questioning 'Why?'** *replaying of memories*
sleeping more unable to sleep **eating more** **eating less**
scared **terrified** *feeling unsafe* **feeling unable to cope**
being afraid to go back where quakes happened – or could happen
unable to sit still – always moving **mood changes**
rapid heart rate unable to move – wanting to be still
angry **frustrated** **irritable** *not wanting, or unable, to remember*
anxious hysterical or irrational at times **overwhelmed**
detached – switched off **have lost interest in anything else**
survivor guilt **nightmares** **flashbacks** **vivid memories**
depression **having suicidal thoughts or talking about suicide**
feeling unable to cope at all *not wanting to be with others much*
wanting to be with others a lot

**Are there other things affecting you, or other people you know,
that you could add to this list?**

Self care strategies that may help you, or others

After trauma, or as traumas and shocks continue, thoughts and feelings can become intense and often are unpredictable. Finding ways every day to decrease your stress levels can help. For many, what's been 'normal' can no longer happen. Many need to find how best to live with their 'new kind of normal', creating new routines and ways of doing things. You may find yourself doing things you never dreamed you would have to. For some, it's about just taking one day – or one part of the day – at a time. As you adjust to your new world, there's likely to be a natural process of grieving happening at the same time. It's a healthy process, so go with it.

Have a look through this wide range of ideas and see what might suit you. Maybe give them all a try – some will work for you better than others. Do them whenever you can because they can help make an important difference to your stress levels.

- 🕒 **Do what you need to do each day but then give *priority* to doing some kind of activity that you find relaxing and enjoyable.** This can help your mind and body have some down time. What relaxes you? What do you enjoy? What could you do today?
- 🕒 **Tell yourself that what you're experiencing are normal reactions to extra-ordinary events.** Let yourself go through grief for the many losses you and others have had due to the earthquakes. The reactions - while they can be very difficult to manage - each play a part in gradually adjusting people to what's happened. It can be reassuring and interesting to learn more about how the human body, mind, emotions, behaviour and spirit react to trauma and disaster. If you'd like to, visit your local library or contact Skylight and request more information about this. You can email rs@skylight-trust.org.nz
- 🕒 **Have a weekly routine that takes as much pressure off you as possible.** You can always do more later on, when you are less stressed. Is there something you can drop from your schedule? Are you expecting too much of yourself? What can make your life simpler? What things don't need to change?
- 🕒 **Sleep and Rest.** Take stock of how much rest and sleep you are able to get each day. You'll know well how much it can be interrupted by quakes, and by stress, but think about ways you might be able to get more. See these links for ways to getting a good night's sleep in stressful times: <http://www.stratos-ltd.co.nz/dms/files/eq/Tips-for-Getting-a-Good-Nights-Sleep.pdf> And see this link for ways to help any children you have to sleep despite the quakes: <http://imhaanz.org.nz/~imhaanzo//sites/default/files/IMHAANZ%20Earthquake%20Letter%20APRIL.pdf>
- 🕒 **Think carefully about how your food affects your mood.** Research lets us know that the kind of food we eat can affect how much energy we have and how we feel. Eat regular, healthy meals and drink plenty of water throughout the day. Have more of vegetables, fish and white meat, eggs and wholemeal breads, and less of sugar, fatty food, coffee, alcohol and chocolate. These last foods will keep you stressed for longer. They may be great for a quick fix, but longer term you'll find eating healthier food will make you feel more able to cope with life's challenges. See this link for more about food and mood, including recipes: <http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/page/79-2005-food-and-mood>
- 🕒 **Laugh or smile about something every day, if you can.** Maybe look out for cartoons, comedy shows or DVDs, funny stories, good jokes, funny images or quirky things that

make you grin. Look for humour in even difficult situations. In the middle of it all, research proves that laughter can improve your mental and physical health, so go for it – as much as you can. These articles, about laughter are really interesting:

http://www.helpguide.org/life/humor_laughter_health.htm and

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201101/why-we-laugh>

- 🕒 **Have a place to be quiet.** Choose a quiet place that helps you feel calm that you can go to, when you feel you need to. It might be outside in nature, a particular room or a special place, like a church chapel or a library, or in your car, driving or parked somewhere peaceful. Turn off your phone. This can be a place to catch your thoughts and just be. Here's an interesting article on why silence can be so helpful:
<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/why-we-all-need-some-peace-and-quiet-2103909.html>
- 🕒 **Breathe.** When we concentrate on our breathing – slowly and deeply – stress and anxiety can decrease. Put your hand on your tummy and breathe so that it pushes against your hand. Focus on your breathing until you feel yourself calm down. Breathe slowly. Do this as often as you need to. Here are some very helpful links about breathing to relieve stress:
<http://www.breathingworks.com/breathing-articles.htm>
- 🕒 **Take regular exercise** – daily if possible – in whatever simple ways you can. It doesn't have to look flash! Make it easy. Dance to your favourite music, walk round the block, garden, try Zumba, walk instead of drive, take a family walk, play family or neighbourhood games outside, jump on a bike, throw a Frisbee, kick a ball, clean up rubbish, take the stairs.... Exercise can make a definite difference as it releases stress.
- 🕒 **Stretch.** Stretching out your body, section by section, can be very helpful in reducing stress. You can do this on the floor, in bed, sitting or standing up. Do it with friends, with your family, or your neighbours! Here's an excellent article on how to stretch well!
<http://heartofhealing.net/relaxation-wellness/stretching/how-to-stretch/>
- 🕒 **Tighten and relax.** Tighten each section of your body, one by one, hold it tight for a few moments, and then relax. Breathe slowly and deeply as you go.
- 🕒 **Think about trying yoga or meditation**, or joining an exercise group.
- 🕒 **Music.** What music relaxes you most? It may not be gentle - it may be hard rock or anything in between. Use music to lift your mood.
- 🕒 **Use any beliefs or faith that you may have.** Many people find this is helpful, such as praying or reading encouraging words.
- 🕒 **Self talk.** Remind yourself of key thoughts, such as like having reactions are normal and expected after disaster, trauma and loss, and they won't last as intensely as this forever. Remind yourself of the ways you could calm, relax and de-stress a bit. You could also write your key thoughts down and stick them up at home or at work, where you'll see them often. Are there any quotes or sayings that encourage you? Use them. Some useful links for this are: <http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/introducing-self-talk> and <http://www.pe2000.com/anx-selftalk.htm>
- 🕒 **If you have panic attacks** breathing in an out of a paper bag can help slow your breathing. Also see this pdf link from The Mental Health Foundation that provides information, some strategies and understanding about these attacks, which can be so scary and arrive out of nowhere sometimes.
<http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/resourcefinder/listings/resource/192/panic-disorder-and-panic-attacks,-mhinz,-2002/>

- 🕒 **Use your imagination.** In the middle of difficult moments, many find that imagining and visualising being somewhere else, or a mental picture of someone or something positive, can transfer their thoughts away from their anxieties. With practice, you could get quite good at this. Here is a helpful link to check out for ideas about visualisation: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/249993-visualization-techniques-for-stress-management/>
- 🕒 **Mindfulness.** This means spending some time grounding yourself, or bringing yourself 'back to earth' so that anxious and agitated thoughts calm down. It helps you focus on the current moment, so that thoughts about anything else are left behind for a while. See this link to download some free mindfulness podcasts that will each guide you through a mindfulness session. Many find this sort of 'down to earth' thinking and grounding very helpful: <http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/page/790-2010-flourishing-for-everybody+toolkit+podcast-reviews>. You could also contact Skylight for an information sheet about grounding ideas for children and young people. Email your request to rs@skylight-trust.org.nz
- 🕒 **Express yourself** – what could help you let out what's inside? Art, music, making things, cooking, writing, keeping a journal or diary, dancing, talking, acting...?
- 🕒 **Use colours.** What colours calm you or energise you? Think of ways to use these in what you wear, or around your home. Colour has more impact on people than we realise.
- 🕒 **What are you wearing?** What clothes do you feel most relaxed in? Or do you own some clothes that make you feel really good? Wear clothes to help your mood.
- 🕒 **Write things down if they're important.** It's easy to be distracted and forgetful after traumatic events, so keep paper or a notebook handy and keep a track of things you don't want to forget.
- 🕒 **Make some lists**
Here are a few questions that could start off your lists. Such lists can give you a different way of looking at life sometimes. They can help give you some control over things.

 - What has changed?
 - What is still the same?
 - How have you adapted to the changes?
 - What do you think you need right now to feel better today?
 - What are you thankful for?
- 🕒 **Stay connected with people.** It helps to go through such times with others. Talking with others honestly builds bridges with others, and so does listening to them. It can help when others know what it's really like and 'get it'. Health touchy touch can be very comforting for many, such as holding a hand, rubbing a shoulder or having a hug.
- 🕒 **Talk about it.** Many say just talking about what's happened, or might happen, helps. Who do you know that you talk to about the quakes? Is there anyone else you could think about talking to? Would it be worth seeing a counsellor to work through difficult emotions or issues you're facing right now?

- 🕒 **Turn it off.** Some people find that listening to, watching or reading the news can raise their stress and anxieties. Some report even feeling rather addicted to it. Consider limiting how much news you listen to, watch or read.
- 🕒 **Have an earthquake plan and take some control.** Make a new plan, or go over again the plan you have, to be very clear about what you can do to be ready when quakes happen. Are there changes that you, or others in your family, might need to make to feel safer? Are there practical things like fixing shelves, or putting precious things away? After a while it can be very helpful to review plans as circumstances can change.
- 🕒 **Take an action.** Many people find that when they feel helpless and frustrated, taking some kind of positive, constructive action can be a relief. Is there something you could do that would be helpful for yourself, or family and friends, neighbours or others? Maybe you could join with some others to do a project?
- 🕒 **Help someone else.** Even in simple ways, helping others can get your mind off your own situation for a while.
- 🕒 **Find out what's bothering or worrying your partner or other people close to you.** Everyone will be reacting differently but we also influence each other, especially if we live or work together. So, through this time, it can help to be open together about what things are like for each other. Check what their needs are – don't just share your own. Maybe plan regular and intentional check in times together. And spend time together relaxing sometimes.
- 🕒 **Find something to look forward to** and plan towards it. What's one thing you can do to build towards your future?
- 🕒 **If you're living in a new place, or your home or community has suffered great damage,** what could you do to make it more like home? Even small things could help do this, such as putting up pictures, picking flowers for a vase or buying something nice for the place.
- 🕒 **Enjoy pets.** It may even not be your own. Being with animals can be very comforting and calming for some people.
- 🕒 **If a difficult anniversary, special day or holiday is coming up** and you find the thought of it is stressful, consider using a ceremony or a simple section to remember what's been lost in your own way, or with others. For example, light candles, use silence, write cards or letters, text or message, attend a special service, make a memory book, plant a tree or make something special. Offer the chance for others to contribute. For further ideas about how to cope with the February 22nd quake anniversary, you could email rs@skylight-trust.org.nz for information or phone 0800 299 100 with your request.
- 🕒 **Use some of these ideas to make your own, personalised SELF CARE PLAN.** Think through what your greatest needs are right now. What do you need for your own wellbeing? Think through the steps to take to look after yourself well. Write them down and then use this as a check list and a guide for each day. Some will be part of your daily routine and others will be things to work towards over the next days and weeks, or goals further down the track.
- 🕒 **If you think that the reactions you are having are too hard to manage, don't hesitate to seek professional help.** Seeing your doctor, or a counsellor or psychologist as soon as possible would be a good place to start to find the right help. You may find this link about post

traumatic stress also helpful, from the Mental Health Foundation:

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/resourcefinder/listings/resource/197/post-traumatic-stress-disorder,-mhinz,-2002/>

- 📖 **Use reading resources.** Check out Skylight's support resource shop to see if any of the titles there would be helpful for you, or for children and teens that you may know. Many people find these very helpful. Also have a look in the emotional resilience, trauma and feelings sections of the shop. See <http://www.skylight.org.nz/Shop/Disaster+Aftermath+Resources> or phone us on 0800 299 100.

And last, but not the least,

📖 **Be very kind to yourself!**

Yes. Treat yourself with the same respect and kindness that you would treat someone else who's facing what you are. Go easy on yourself. Don't expect too much of yourself. How do you think you could do that today? And tomorrow? And the day after? And this quote is for you:

Courage doesn't always roar.
Sometimes courage is the quiet voice
at the end of the day saying,
"I will try again tomorrow."

Mary Anne Radmacher

Supporting children and teens

If you have children or teens to care for, you are welcome to contact Skylight to be emailed or sent helpful information in supporting them well through these stressful times also. Phone 0800 299 100 or email rs@skylight-trust.org.nz

If you, or others, have suicidal thoughts

Suicidal thoughts and feelings are rarely spoken about, but they are not unusual after great grief and trauma. They can be scary and overwhelming for people. For some, they're brief thoughts that come and then pass again straight away. For others, they may become more persistent and stay in their minds most of the time. Whatever the situation, help is definitely available.

If you ever think that you, or someone else, is at risk of taking any kind of self harming actions, you can ask for help from: your doctor or medical centre, your local mental health team, a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist, a phone support line (Lifeline 0800 111 777, Samaritans 0800 726 666, or Youthline 0800 376 633), a local support organisation, or your nearest hospital emergency department. In emergencies dial 111.

If you request for help isn't heard, ask again or ask someone else.