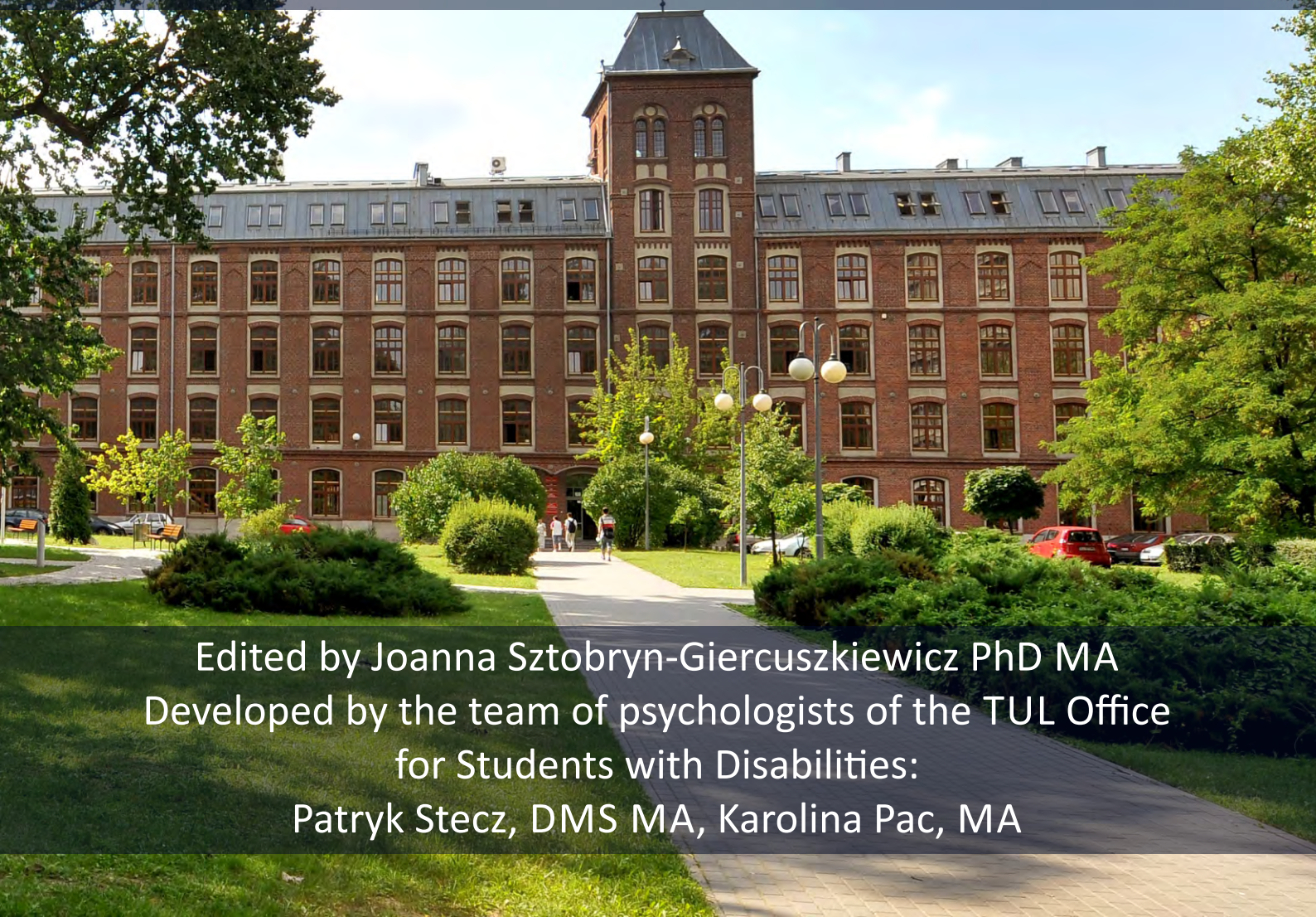


Coronavirus, how to handle the situation?

Guide for students, PhD students and staff of Lodz University of Technology



Edited by Joanna Sztabryn-Giercuskiewicz PhD MA
Developed by the team of psychologists of the TUL Office
for Students with Disabilities:
Patryk Stecz, DMS MA, Karolina Pac, MA

Dear Students, PhD Students and Colleagues,

In this difficult time of coronavirus pandemic, we see the need to provide you with some information that can prove useful in our everyday life, both at home and at the University. For the first time in history the community of Lodz University of Technology faces the situation when e-work and e-learning is carried out on such a large scale. Each of us may be accompanied by negative emotions in everyday situations. Let us not feel ashamed to show such emotions, but let us do our best to not panic.

Lodz University of Technology takes all the effort to assist its students and staff in this difficult situation. We have launched an online psychological support service (both in Polish and English).

Under <https://www.facebook.com/patryk.bon.54> you can receive advice from our on-call psychologist.

You can also contact psychologists under the following Lodz consultation lines:

Vis Salutis Foundation: phone 888 960 980, 888 900 980

**Regional Committee for Defence of Children Rights
(for both children and adults): phone 506 803 673.**



ARE YOU WORRIED WITH PRESENT SITUATION?

Many problems that we encounter during the pandemic, decrease the quality of our life. **The growth observed in the infection statistics, death toll of coronavirus, spread of pandemic, risk of infecting the loved ones, social isolation, loss of income, lack of social responsibility** are the issues that can apply to all of us and decrease our sense of security.

Remember: fear is a natural and healthy reaction that allows us to survive.

Symptoms of stress that drive the spiral of anxiety, can prevent us from taking reasonable decisions and regaining control over our life. In such cases:

- we are more likely to remember the negative information and we are more emotional about it,
- we compulsively look for more information about the threat,
- upon hearing about „the home quarantine” and „restrictions” we may switch on the „flight or fight” response. We rebel or we withdraw from life,
- in the context of the deterioration of the financial situation and suspension of classes at schools we worry about negative effects of the events and adopt the black scenario,
- we are alert when looking around our surroundings, we may fear a close contact with another person who know appears to be a potential carrier of the disease.

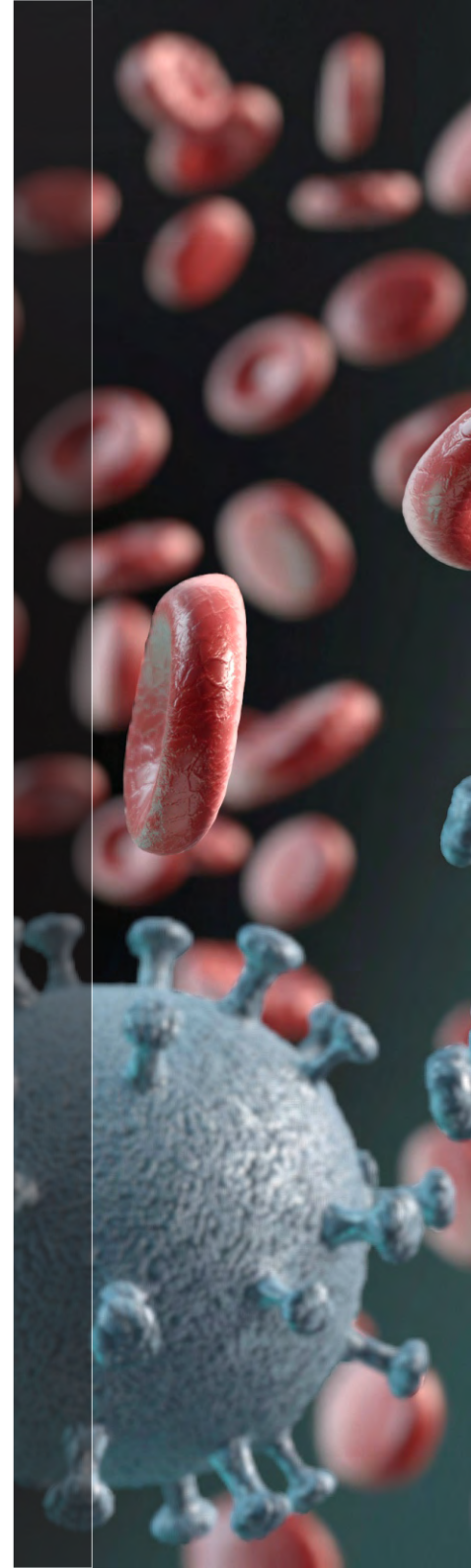
It is worth realizing that we may exhibit reactions that weaken our sense of control, impede rational decision making and intensify stress. Awareness is the first step in regaining control.



Typical psychological problems and their consequences that can naturally occur in the face of coronavirus spread include:

- fear and anxiety about our health and the health of our loved ones,
- increased need for sleep or poorer quality of sleep,
- changes in eating behaviours,
- difficulties with concentration,
- increased symptoms of some chronic diseases (pulmonary diseases, dermatological diseases),
- increase in the intake of psychoactive substances (alcohol, nicotine),
- feeling of loneliness,
- aggravation of depression.

In case of coexistence of previous psychological disorders your pharmacological treatment should be continued, and you should be aware that some symptoms of the disease may temporarily intensify.

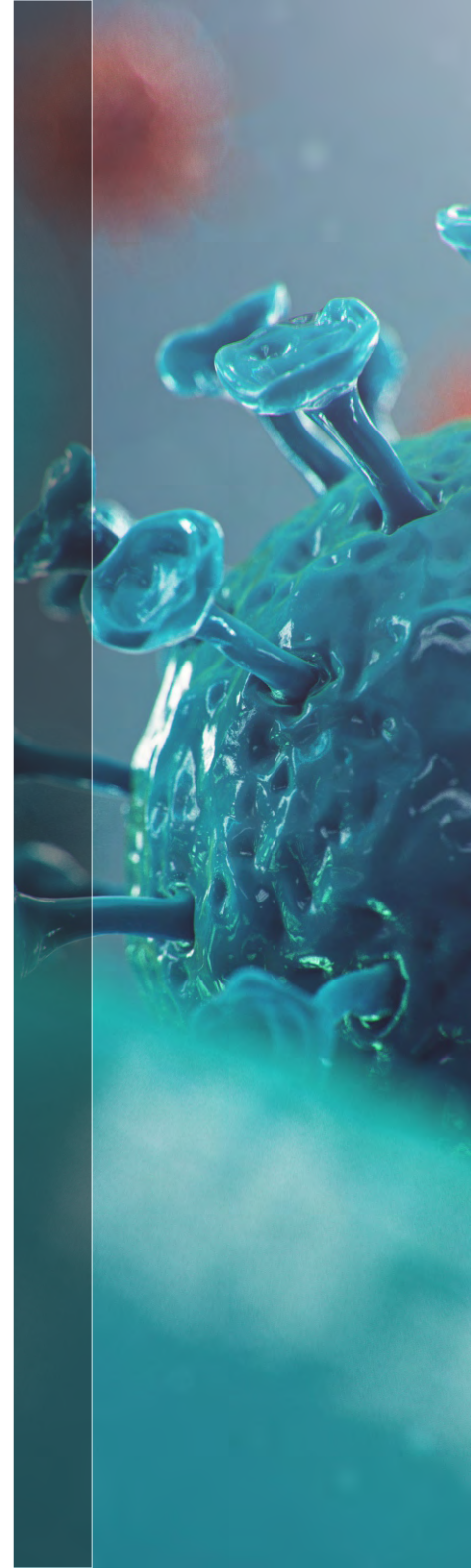


The state of epidemic announced in Poland has caused for numerous people changes in everyday functioning, loss of freedom in decision-making, limiting the freedom of movement and spending free time as well as hampering social contacts and family relations.

In a natural reaction to loss we may be going through the following stages, similar to those characteristic of the mourning process:

- shock,
- denial of the situation,
- disorganization of behaviour - difficulties with performing everyday activities,
- reorganization of behaviour – acceptance of the situation and return to stable functioning.

Remember: you can, but you do not have to, go through the stages enumerated above. If something bothers you in your behaviour, consult a psychologist. Please, focus on the fact that this is a temporary situation, which - like everything in life - will come to an end one day.



HOW TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS

- Do not try to relax "by force". Sometimes the only solution is to accept difficult emotions and to confront the situations that cause fear. You should not criticize yourself for experiencing stress and fear, as well as not suppress these emotions in an excessive way.
- Use relaxation. If you have never come across relaxation techniques, use materials available on the Internet, give yourself a chance.
- Here is an exemplary breathing technique for counteracting a panic reaction:
 - take a breath (for three seconds),
 - hold the breath (for two seconds),
 - breathe the air out through your mouth (four seconds),
 - then wait two seconds until taking your next breath.

Do experiment with the abovementioned breathing technique to match it to your individual predispositions. Try to breathe with your diaphragm. Determine how much time you need to inhale and how much time you need to exhale.

- In order to reduce stress and anxiety devote your time to get occupied with what you like doing:
 - the more you focus on activities and the more often you do what you like, the less stress and anxiety will you feel. In the process, areas of the brain (ventral prefrontal cortex), responsible for inhibiting negative emotions, are stimulated,
 - optimum level of contacts with your loved ones helps activate neurons responsible for feeling safe and experiencing positive emotions, which, among others, causes the increase in oxytocin. Do not isolate yourself at all costs. Call your loved ones from time to time, talk to them.

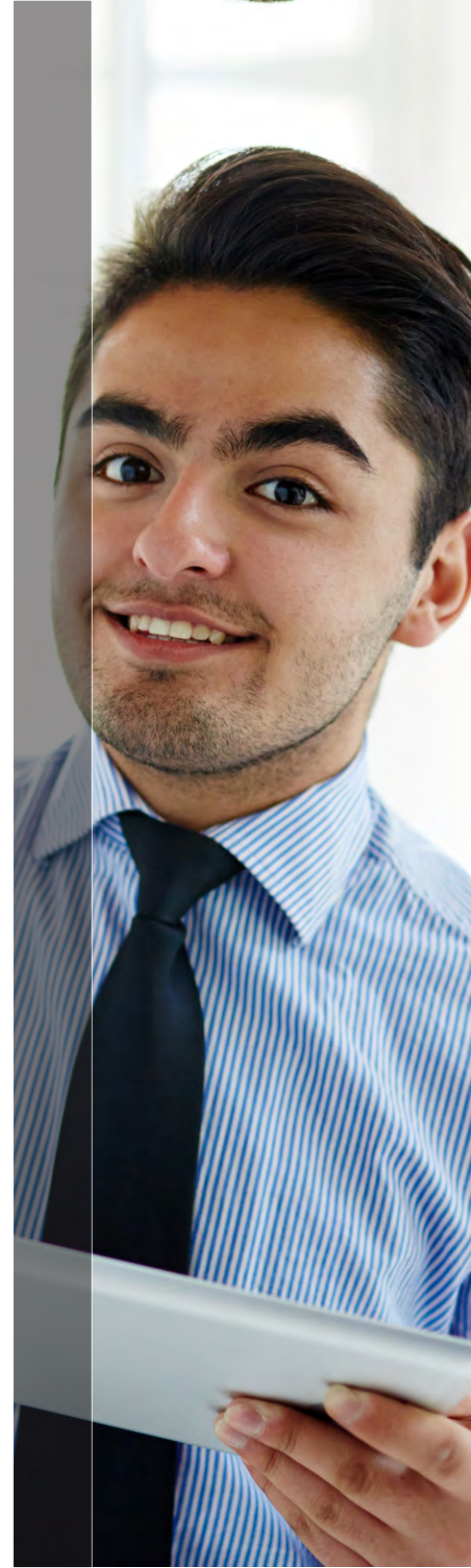


HYGIENE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

- Try to structure your activities. If possible, do not deal with all at once. You will be more attentive and put less effort in your actions when you perform one activity at a time, exceptionally two, never five at one.
- Take more time to sleep. Sleeping is nowadays essential for your overloaded organism. If you suffer from insomnia, pay more attention to yourself during the day.
- Treat yourself with a moment of pleasure in healthy doses (a TV series, a book, DIY, hot chocolate).
- If possible, regulate your need for contacts. If you are overloaded with excess contacts, take a moment with yourself. If you miss conversations, organise some time to talk to a loved one in order to improve your well-being.
- Take care of other people who may need your help. Shopping for an elderly person or simply making a phone call to someone who may feel particularly lonely will not only be a support for that person, but also will help you find value in the current situation.
- Give a purpose to your actions:
 - lack of acceptance to what is happening may cause a build-up of your inner tension,
 - while planning activities, relate to what is important for you and what you can influence. Such approach will increase your sense of control.
- If you have such opportunity – occupy yourself with the activities which previously lacked your attention due to your general business.



- Honestly recognize how far you are able to engage in remote work and do make the most of this time; If you run into problems associated with the multitude of your roles, talk about them to your leader/tutor. Be explicit about your specific problems.
- Try to reduce the number of factors that will distract you during your work. Organize a temporary workplace:
 - it is important to accept that you cannot eliminate all distractors. Do not expect to always be able to do everything that you used to do before, especially if you have to accept many compromises,
 - if you used to procrastinate, keep in mind that in the current situation the effects of such organization of work can be very negative. Try not to postpone your commitments to the very last moment,
 - it is understandable that we will not fully reproduce in our homes the conditions we have been used to in our workplace (for example no children nearby, use of professional equipment). Make compromises without giving up. You will probably gradually adapt to the situation,
 - remember that arbitrary, unreasonable abstention from performing your duties without giving any reason may be treated as unjustified. Do not build up problems.
- If you experience troubles with studying, please look for online resources to help you find motivation to learn. We recommend among others:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXoMCNH_ZJg



IF YOU ARE A TEACHER OR A LEADER

- Set reasonable limits of work involvement, both yours and of your students /staff:
 - take into consideration the possibilities and limitations of your own and of your students/staff (individual, associated with the working place and conditions, family and health situation),
 - show understanding, remember that in current situation everyone, including yourself, reacts to stress more intensely,
 - set requirements but also appreciate your students/staff for their readiness to work and academic progress.
- Give feedback, be honest.
- Try to determine the rules of e-work and distribute tasks in a just way, so that the students/staff feel treated equally.



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

AS THE KEY TO SOLVING THE PROBLEM

- We will fight back the epidemic only if we share responsibility for the situation as well as for finding and implementing proper solutions. No parliament, ministry, university, employer or ordinance will solve the problem without our participation.
- Excessive focus on your own needs will result in the leakage in the social support network, which will contribute to the escalation of problems.
- One of the most serious consequences of the epidemic is the feeling of loneliness and the negative effects of social isolation. Let us not allow for the aggravation of this state.
- Helping others increases our sense of having some causative power and is a natural response to the feeling of belonging to the society. We need to belong to a society in order to maintain our mental health.
- Pay more attention to your capability of helping others with their specific problems, like, for example, solving a problem with a computer, shopping, material help, a simple conversation.
- Your reflection will increase the chance that a given person will receive the necessary support.
- Your help will contribute to maintaining healthy reflexes in all of us, especially that we are all bond into one social network.

