

Big Foot in the Bedroom: a Symptom of COVID-19 Anxiety

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The front door broke away from its hinges and Big Foot—all eight feet of him—lurched into my house with claws out and fangs bared. I quickly divined the reason for his intrusion—Big Foot was The Virus and he was there to get me. I jerked awake with the realization that I had to deal with my COVID-19 anxiety. But how?

Yes, we're all in this together. As social distancing creates empty spaces between us, differences of opinion on continuing stay-at-home orders are leading to even more turbulence. An abundance of news articles on weird dreams seems to indicate that we have become members of a collective pandemic subconsciousness. National Geographic magazine recently reported on the phenomena of strange or disturbing virus-themed dreams. Nightmares, according to the article, can be warning signs of anxieties that we might not otherwise perceive in our waking lives.¹

Back to Big Foot. He and other menacing creatures have been clomping, slithering or oozing through my dreams a few times a week since February, when I first noticed an uptick in articles on the novel coronavirus. Recently I shared my concerns with my friend and coworker, Grace Campagna, director of our employee advocacy support center, BenefitsVIP®.

"I'm not an anxious person, but how can you not have anxiety with what's going on in the world?" Grace said after I described my dream. Her statement was a revelation; she's one of those take-charge people who always seems so calm. Yet she experiences anxiety, too.

"For me," she said, "meditation takes the worry away for a couple of hours. When I start feeling anxious, I just breathe." She explained that the simple act of mindful breathing is a way to refocus the brain from obsessing about the past (or the future) and living in the present. Cultivating the practice of resting the mind on an "anchor" (breathing) is a central aspect of meditation. The process of sitting still and focusing on the present involves learning basic mindfulness meditation practices, such as [following the breath](#), and doing it on a regular schedule.²

Grace meditates four times a week, and she has facilitated our company's twice-a-week lunchtime meditation sessions over the last five years.

"Meditation shuts down the clutter in my head," she said. "I'm usually going a thousand miles an hour, but when I meditate it keeps me present."

My COVID-19 anxiety and frequent nightmares convinced me to give meditation a try.

Last week I joined Grace and several other coworkers on a guided meditation conference call. She queued up a YouTube video by [Mindful Movement](#) and the guide, Sara, began to narrate the 20-minute session. Sara instructed us to inhale, pulling in a white light, and then exhale, pushing out negativity. She noted that it's impossible to draw a breath from the past or access one from the future; a breath is always in the moment. Maybe it was the deep breathing or Sara's calm instructions, but I felt something ease in my chest—a release like the uncoiling of a spring. Before I knew it, the 20-minute meditation was over.

Is meditation a miracle cure for anxiety, a pandemic panacea? I really don't know yet. Also, the nightmare came back last night. I woke up in a sweat in the wee hours but remembered what Grace had told me: "When I start feeling anxious, I just breathe." I breathed in and out for a few minutes and felt the uncoiling in my chest, the same release I had experienced during the meditation session. So yes, I'll give it a try over the next several weeks to see what happens.

I don't want to oversimplify the impact of the pandemic. We all pine for the days before the virus, when a loving hug or a benign handshake didn't result in infection, a hospitalization, or worse. We worry about the financial stresses of job loss or the new, gnawing threat of meat and poultry shortages.³ We worry that despite our constant disinfecting, social distancing and mask-wearing, the virus will Big Foot its way into our homes. Anxiety has emerged as the ever-present undercurrent that's become hardwired in our brains and emotions. To coin another metaphor, anxiety is the tie that binds us.

Still, as I said in my [Quarantine 15](#) article, we can't get this time back. I don't want to waste the next months being a victim of COVID-19 anxiety. In search of better control, I'm:

- Starting every day by remembering three things I'm grateful for
- Saying "thank you" often to loved ones, coworkers, my employer and the Universe
- Listening to uplifting podcasts (see More Resources below for ideas)
- Calling my friends and family
- Creating something: a painting, a sculpture or a piece of fiction
- Maintaining my daily walking schedule and healthful eating program
- Laughing more
- Inhaling, exhaling...repeat, repeat
- If all else fails, seeking help from my primary care physician, health insurance carrier, my company's employee assistance program and our [BenefitsVIP](#) support service

Is there a Big Foot in your dreams? There are many resources available that may help you cope. Check out [Mental Health America's Mental Health and COVID-19-Information and Resources](#) for information on how to get better control of COVID-19 anxiety, and much more.

Be safe and take care, America. #TogetherApart.

¹[National Geographic](#), "The Pandemic Is Giving People Vivid, Unusual Dreams. Here's Why."

²[Mindful.org](#), "A Breathing Practice to Stay in the Moment"

³[Bloomberg](#), "U.S. Could be Weeks from Meat Shortages with Shutdowns Spreading"

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