

# Understanding Anxiety:

what we learned from the pandemic?



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# WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

This booklet is for everyone who has experienced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and wants to understand how this period has affected our mental health.

# Do you remember what the beginning of the pandemic was like?

To help us recall that time,  
**let's meet Bia.**

In early 2020, Bia had a simple routine: she worked, took care of the house, and made daily plans.

When the first news about a new virus broke, she was worried, but she still couldn't imagine how much life would change. Little by little, she began to feel her body getting more tense and her mind filled with thoughts.

With the arrival of COVID-19 came isolation, changes in routine, fear of getting sick, worries about money, and difficult news every day.





Bia began living in a constant state of alert, tired and anxious, unable to relax. Over time, cases declined and life began to return to normal. Even so, Bia realized that something still wasn't right.

Although the danger had subsided, her body remained tense, she was still very worried, and she had trouble relaxing, as if she were still preparing for a threat.

Understanding this scenario helps us recognize that what we've felt during the pandemic — and even today — is the result of a long and difficult period.

**And that deserves  
care and attention!**

# Let's recap what happened?

## 2019

**DEC:**

First cases in  
Wuhan, China.

## 2021

**JAN:**

Start of vaccination

**MAR:**

highest number of deaths  
recorded in the country

**APR:**

Gamma variant

**JUL:**

Delta variant

**DEC:**

Omicron variant

## 2020

**FEB:**

First case of COVID-19  
in Brazil

**MAR:**

WHO declares a pandemic;  
social isolation; mask-wearing  
and rise in cases

# 2023 2024

**MAY:**

pandemic slows  
down – end of public  
health emergency

# 2022

easing of restrictions;  
vaccine booster shots

# 2025 2026

post-pandemic;  
emotional hangover

# What happened?

## Understanding the past

Even before the pandemic, many people in Brazil were already struggling with anxiety—many worries and that feeling of having “a head full of thoughts.” Bia felt that way too.

When COVID-19 arrived, all of this became even more difficult. Isolation, the fear of catching the disease, changes in routine, and uncertainty about the future took a heavy toll on our emotions. People began to feel more insecure, tired, and had trouble relaxing.

## In other words,

the pandemic didn't create this suffering from scratch: it exacerbated a situation that already existed.





# A Mental Health Pandemic as Well:

## What Have We Seen, and What Do We Still See?

When we think of COVID-19, we usually think of the virus and masks. But there was something else very important that also marked this period:

the pandemic's  
impact on our  
mental health!



Bia started worrying all the time — she even worried about worrying too much. Her racing mind, trying to handle everything at once, ended up increasing her anxiety symptoms. Even when the situation began to improve, those feelings didn't disappear overnight. Bia realized that, even as life returned to normal, anxiety still crept in. To this day, many people feel this way. **This shows us that the pandemic didn't just affect that moment, but that it may have left scars that are still part of our reality.**

# What do our studies show?

1

## **Worry snowballed:**

Many people entered a cycle of worry, and when worry becomes nonstop, anxiety can increase even more.

2

## **Uncertainties increased anxiety:**

A future full of doubts — about health, work, and money — further intensified anxiety symptoms.

3

## **Things didn't end overnight:**

For many people, the body took time to realize that the danger had subsided, and anxiety persisted, even as cases began to decline and vaccines became available.

4

## **People are affected differently:**

Women and young people were among those who felt the emotional impact of the pandemic the most, experiencing higher levels of anxiety.

5

## **The body feels it too:**

Palpitations, sweaty palms, and trouble sleeping were common during this period. It was as if the body were constantly trying to protect itself from a threat.





## What have we learned?

The pandemic was one of the most difficult times we've faced, but it also taught us some important lessons. **One of the main ones?**

**Taking care of the mind is just as important as taking care of the body!**

The way we face difficult situations makes all the difference! Resilience—our ability to adapt to the toughest situations—acted as a shield against anxiety. Bia gradually realized that ignoring emotional distress didn't make it go away, so she began to:

**Not being so hard on herself:** adapting daily activities to take place indoors (such as cooking, reading, or studying) helped calm her and fill her time in a healthy way during isolation.

**Resuming habits and hope:** Bia returned to simple hobbies that brought her joy, such as board games. She began to envision a better future and focus on hopeful thoughts, a strategy that helped her cope with the stress of this difficult time.

**Support network:** Bia resumed talking openly with her friends and colleagues, as social support — whether from friends or family — was essential for reducing her anxiety symptoms.

### **Important reminder:**

These lessons aren't just a thing of the past. The strategies that helped Bia during that time are still relevant today and can be important allies in facing the challenges that may arise!

# Looking to the future

We must not let the period we are living through fade into collective oblivion. The pandemic has left emotional scars that may still be present in our daily lives. Remembering what happened is a way to acknowledge the suffering we have experienced and to better care for ourselves and others in the future.

The pandemic has taught us that mental health care must be a constant priority, not just in times of crisis. This involves strengthening public policies, expanding access to mental health services, and encouraging habits of self-care and mutual support in daily life.



# What to do?

**Maintain a healthy routine:** small habits, such as getting enough sleep and exercising, can help with emotional regulation.

**Talk about how you feel:** sharing your concerns with people you trust can help organize your thoughts and relieve tension.

**Seek reliable information:** learning more about anxiety is an important step toward managing it better. In addition to this booklet, there are other resources that can help you better understand anxiety and find strategies to cope with it.

Access other materials







# Seeking Support

If anxiety has been disrupting your life and you feel you can't cope on your own, it's important to seek professional support.

## You can look for services such as:

- Psychology teaching clinics (usually free);
- UBS in your city;
- CAPS (Psychosocial Care Centers);
- CRAS.



# Let's review what we've learned in this booklet?

- 1** Symptoms of anxiety can arise or intensify during times of prolonged uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2** Living in a constant state of alert, experiencing muscle tension, having trouble sleeping, or racing thoughts are important signs that your body and mind need care.
- 3** Not being too hard on yourself, rediscovering small pleasures, and relying on a support network make a difference in coping with anxiety.
- 4** And, above all, remember that you are not alone: just like Bia, many people still carry emotional scars from the pandemic, and acknowledging this is the first step toward self-care.

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