

The lure of conspiracy theories and how to protect yourself

[I]n the same way that our immune system can leave us more vulnerable to pathogens, our emotional state can make us more open to false — and potentially harmful — beliefs. People who feel scared, confused, alone and under siege are especially at risk of coming under the sway of conspiracy theories, experts say. But there are steps we can take to protect ourselves from these dangerous ideas. The first may be understanding where these ideas come from. “Conspiracy theories tend to flourish in times of crisis,” says [social psychologist] [Karen Douglas](#)... Humans have an innate need for knowledge and certainty, to feel safe, secure and in control, and to feel good about ourselves and the groups we belong to, she adds. “When these needs are frustrated, conspiracy theories might seem to offer some kind of relief.”

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One of the best ways to curb intense negative feelings is to avoid or dial back on whatever is causing them, [psychologist Jill Rathus] suggests.

So all that [doom-scrolling](#)? Uninstall Twitter from your phone. And those 24/7 news alerts? Turn off notifications. Think of it as watching what you put in your head the same way you watch what you put in your body.

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