



10 steps to Looking after your mental health while the nation is in lockdown

Looking after our mental health has never been more important than now. Below are some tips and advice on how to do this while the nation is in lockdown.

1. Reduce your anxiety

Do not spend hours watching the television, trawling the internet and exposing yourself to the constant reminder of the situation we are in, although it is important that you stay updated with the most recent government advice, obsessing over this will build up high levels of anxiety. Use reliable sources of information like the NHS website and have an activity planned for after you have watched the news to try take your mind off things.

2. Connect with people

Keeping in contact with people will raise your spirits and although it requires effort to do, the benefits far outweigh the efforts involved.

Mind.org.uk suggest the following:

- *Make plans to video chat with people or groups you'd normally see in person.*
- *You can also arrange phone calls or send instant messages or texts.*
- *If you're worried that you might run out of stuff to talk about, make a plan with someone to watch a show or read a book separately so that you can discuss it when you contact each other.*
- *Think of other ways to keep in contact with people while meeting in person is not possible. For example, you could check your phone numbers are up to date, or that you have current email addresses for friends you've not seen for a while*

3. Set yourself a routine to follow

We are creatures of habit and having a daily plan to fill your day will help to keep your mind active. Establish a balance between work and relaxation time, set a time that you will turn your computer off each day and take time to do something that you enjoy once the working day is over.

Try and ensure that you are sticking to a routine that reflects that of your normal daily life as much as possible. Going to bed and getting up at a reasonable time will encourage good quality sleep hygiene which in turn will support your mental well-being.

4. Stay active

Exercise releases endorphins sometimes referred to as our happy hormones but staying active while confined to our homes can be challenging. There are many online fitness programs aimed at being completed within the home that you can follow. If those are not for you, activities such as cleaning the house, using stairs to exercise on and dancing to music are also some other options. Avoid sitting for long periods of time, just changing your position or the room you are in can have a positive impact on your mood.

5. Get fresh air.

Although we are restricted with how much time we can be outside, if you are lucky enough to have a garden, now is a good time to start making use of it. If the garden is not an option, try opening your front or back door and sitting on the doorstep to increase your time outside.

The sun's rays help provide us with Vitamin D which in turn can aid our mental wellbeing and being closer to nature is known to have calming effects. It is also possible to get the positive effects of nature while staying indoors at home.

Mind.org.uk suggest you try the following:

- *Spend time with the windows open to let in fresh air.*
- *Arrange a comfortable space to sit, for example by a window where you can look out over a view of trees or the sky, or watch birds and other animals.*
- *Listen to natural sounds, like recordings or apps that play birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall. Get as much natural light as you can. Spend time in your garden if you have one,*

6. Set yourself positive goals/activities

We are constantly encouraged to look after our body through eating five fruit and vegetables a day. Our minds need the same care and attention. Annafreud.com suggest that we identify activities that make us feel good and incorporate these into our daily routine. Identify what "self-care" means for you and build in more activities that you enjoy or help to keep you calm and relaxed. Once you are clear about what works for you, you can start to identify some simple personal goals. For example, it could be going out for a daily walk, meditating, exercising or something else. Setting aside 15 minutes a day to do this may seem small but starting off with something measurable and achievable will help you identify strategies to prioritise self-care. The following questions may help you focus your plans for the day:

- What am I grateful for today?
- Who am I checking in on or connecting with today?
- What expectations of 'normal' am I letting go of today?
- How am I getting fresh air today?
- How am I moving my body today?
- What positive change am I creating, cultivating or inviting in today?

7. Be kind to yourself

Although many of us are currently working from home, the pressures of everyday life may still be there. It may be that you are parent and looking after your children while balancing work, it may be that you are remotely caring for older or vulnerable family members. Whatever the pressures, do not doubt or judge yourself and your abilities. You are not alone; others will also be struggling at some stage or another. Remember that the images that you see posted on social media may not be a true reflection of what is actually happening in households across the nation right now.

8. Eat and stay hydrated.

With little to do while we are home, we may be tempted by the contents of the fridge on a regular basis but remember our minds and bodies are fuelled by what we consume and there are strong links between food and mood. You may also want to consider the quantities of alcohol that you consume during this time as it is known to enhance low moods and feelings of depression. Minds.org suggest the following:

- *Think about your diet. Your appetite might change if your routine changes, or if you're less active than you usually are. Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can help your mood and energy levels.*
- *Drink water regularly. Drinking enough water is important for your mental and physical health. Changing your routine might affect when you drink or what fluids you drink. It could help to set an alarm or use an app to remind you.*
- *If you are self-isolating, you can ask someone to drop off essential food items for you. If they do this, ask them to leave food at your doorstep, to avoid face-to-face contact with each other.*

9. Take your medication

If you are currently prescribed medication to aid your mental health, it is important that you continue to take your prescription during times of isolation. Ensure that you have enough and plan carefully how and when you obtain a repeat prescription. Suddenly stopping medication without consulting your GP can be harmful.

10. Talk about your feelings

If you find that you are struggling with your mental health, find a trusted person you can talk to about this, this could be a friend, a work colleague or family member. Bottling up emotions and feelings can be detrimental to our mental health and even if the person you talk to cannot solve your problems, just talking things through can help alleviate your anxiety or low mood. If you don't feel able to talk to someone you know, about your feelings, there are lots of support agencies out there who can be contacted by phone or online.

Useful sources of information and support:

Organisation name	Website	Support offered
Minds	https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse60e98	General guidance and information regarding mental health and how to support this during the Corona Virus
Harmless	www.harmless.org.uk	Offer online support for people and families experiencing self-harm concerns.
Cruse	www.cruse.org.uk	Bereavement support
Beat	www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk	Website offering support for young people and their families experiencing an eating disorder.
SANEline	www.sane.org.uk	Charity run organisation supporting mental health
Time to Change	www.time-to-change.org.uk	Anti-stigma campaign lead by the charity 'Minds'
Anna Freud Centre	https://www.annafreud.org/media/11242/looking-after-each-other-ourselves	Children's mental health charity offering specific guidance to schools and teachers
Samaritans	www.samaritans.org	24hour support online/phone freephone 116 123
Action for happiness	www.actionforhappiness.org	Ten keys to happier living