

## COVID-19 Managing our Wellbeing

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We're all facing this unusual and uncertain circumstance in our working life and within our community and it is completely normal and expected to feel a bit stressed, worried and confused. None of us have faced a situation like this before and we are all figuring out how to act and what to feel day to day. It's really important that as well as following the practical guidance to help us keep well physically, we also look after our mental health and wellbeing.

### Stay connected

If you are working from home or self-isolating stay connected with others to prevent yourself feeling cut off or detached. Telephone, message and video-call friends, family and colleagues. You may want to get creative and set up activities to do at the same time as friends like virtual film nights or yoga sessions, chatting afterwards to share views. At the Centre we always encourage conversation over a cuppa, so still do that virtually with colleagues over skype, maybe arrange shared lunch breaks where you can catch up with team mates.

### Balance

Try and maintain a balance between avidly following all the latest updates and following lots of news items on social media with having time away from it, allow yourself time away from Coronavirus talk. Maybe seek information and updates at set times of the day and switch off news alerts on your phone. Also keep a balanced view when reading things online as there are already so many fake stories and guidance. When you do want updates, go to reliable sources such as the WHO (World Health Organization) NHS and government websites.

### Managing stress

Give yourself time to stop for a moment and consciously think about what usually helps you when you're feeling a bit stressed and maybe create a plan or list of things you can do in moments of worry or tension. Remember that stress has a negative impact on our immune systems so if we can manage our stress better, we actually increase our chances of staying well. We all have different things that work for us, it could be doing breathing exercises, journaling, chatting with friends, physical exercise, computer games, cooking, watching a film, sitting in the garden, having a soak in the bath. Having a think in advance will help if you put these things into action if you find yourself starting to worry.

### Stop and notice your feelings

If you do feel stressed or anxious stop and notice these feelings and let them be there. This might sound strange as we naturally want to get rid of uncomfortable feelings, but sometimes when we try and fight how we feel we actually create extra tension. Try saying to yourself "I notice I'm feeling stressed out". As soon as you say this you create a slight separation between your feelings and the part of you that is observing them. It can help to

lessen panicky or unpleasant feelings. Adding some deep breaths at the same time can also help you to not get too caught up in the worry. You can also reassure yourself and remind yourself that it's normal to feel a bit worried at the moment.

## **Routine**

We are all having to do things slightly differently at the moment and developing a routine can be really helpful. If you're working at home you may find it takes a few days to find your flow, and that's ok. It's good to get up at the same time, try and create a space at home to work so you can walk away from it when you have breaks. It might help to break your time up into smaller chunks, getting up and having a stretch every 45 mins or doing some exercise at lunchtime. Again, maybe schedule in a chat with a team meet at the same time every day. This is a strange time for us all, it's ok to feel a bit out of kilter at first. Remember how incredibly adaptable humans can be, you'll soon adjust to your new routine.

## **The Basics**

In a panic we can easily forget the simplest things like eating nourishing food, drinking enough water and getting enough sleep. This may sound boring, but we could all be in this situation for a while to come so try and avoid unhelpful coping strategies like drinking and smoking more than usual or turning to the comfort food a little too often. Whilst these things can give a quick fix, they all have a significant impact on our brains and emotions. Sleep is also important for our immunity so treat yourself to a little more than usual.

## **Remember why we're doing this**

It's easy to forget why we're having to make such significant change to our working life when we're feeling fit and well and are on top of the hand washing and sneezing into our elbows. Remember that we're doing this to protect others who may be more at risk than us. We are all in this together and we are all doing our bit for the community. Remembering this can give us a little boost.

## **Pre-existing mental health difficulties**

You may already be living with anxiety, depression or other mental health challenges and all these changes could exacerbate things or throw you off course. For some people having too much time alone, or too much time with others at home, can make things feel more difficult. Make sure you have a plan in place should your symptoms deteriorate so you know who you can contact and those around you know how best to support you. Plan ahead to make sure you keep on top of medication supplies and prescriptions.

## **Helpful links**

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>