



Top tips for looking after your mental health during Covid-19

1. Look out for signs of stress

Whatever your current, personal situation – whether you are working from home, still working, furloughed and/or home schooling it is a hugely stressful time. Covid-19 is an unprecedented global pandemic posing a risk to both physical and mental health. Stress is your body's natural reaction to pressure. In usual circumstances many of us will thrive on stress to get us through a busy time at work, job interview or presentation. However, stress becomes a problem when it affects your ability to cope with that pressure.

We all react to stress differently and we all have different levels or amounts of stress that we can cope with. While we cope with the Covid-19 pandemic you may experience feelings of stress for an extended period of time and your mental health may be affected as it never has before.

Some signs of stress to look out for include:

- Struggling to sleep or sleeping too much
- Over or under eating & drinking, including alcohol and caffeine
- Feeling physically unwell with headaches, aching muscles or stomach problems
- Your thoughts may change and you may worry more
- Your relationships with other people may be affected. You may be extra grumpy, angry or tearful. You may feel particularly needy and need extra comfort or you may withdraw from other people.

2. Maintain a routine

In a world of uncertainty it is even more important to maintain some sort of routine. Your usual routine of going to work and school will have changed. All this change is unsettling so it is a good idea to create a new routine. A routine is crucial to maintaining your sense of purpose, maintaining a sense of who you are and keeping your confidence.

Try and make things feel as normal as possible. Make sure you do everything you would normally do. It is important to make sure that every day you're still getting dressed, cleaning your teeth and taking any medication you need to. Plan in time for work, home schooling, exercise, hobbies and socialising.

Right now, it is very easy for all the days to roll in to one. If you work part time, plan what days you are working and be strict about sticking to them, otherwise it's very easy for everyday to be a work day. Being at home all the time means that the weekends don't feel any different or like a real break. But within your routine try and make the weekends feel different. Perhaps you could plan in some different meals, a longer walk or a day in the garden.

3. Limit the news and speculation

News of Covid-19 and speculation about what will happen next is everywhere. Absorbing information all the time will ensure it remains at the front of your mind. Predicting what could happen next can increase your worrying and anxiety.

Make sure that you are getting your information from reliable sources. Make a concerted effort to limit when you take in the news, perhaps only watch it or check a news website once a day. Also, be careful what you are taking in via social media. Stop scrolling your news feed, unfollow and mute accounts you follow if you find what they are sharing distressing.

4. Concentrate on what is in your control

It is extremely easy to be overcome by worrying. It is important to remember what is in and out of your control. This global pandemic is full of uncertainty and there is very little that we can control about it. If you find yourself worrying a lot, try and make a concerted effort to change your thinking to concentrate on what you can control and minimising excessive amounts of worrying. For instance, you can control your actions, you can control the work that you do at home, you can control the activities that you do which will help your mental and physical health. But you cannot control whether other people are following social distancing rules and you cannot control when museums and schools can reopen.

5. Talk about it and stay connected

It is very important to talk about mental health. If you find yourself struggling please find someone to talk to. Talking to someone you trust can help to get your thoughts and feelings out of your head. As the saying goes – a problem shared is a problem halved! Sharing the way that you feel can open you up to a different view and some comforting words. You may also find that the person you talk to, especially during this time of a pandemic, will have been having similar thoughts and feelings.

Try and stay connected to your family, friends and colleagues. We are lucky to have so much technology which enables us to stay in contact. Plan in regular catch ups with friends, family and colleagues to stop you feeling lonely and isolated and feel more connected and supported.

6. Keep active

There is lots of evidence that physical activity is good for your mental health. Doing something physical is thought to cause chemical changes in the brain to balance your mood and increase energy levels. After doing something physical you will feel more awake, more alive and calmer as exercise can help to expel the stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. It is also good for your self esteem, helps us sleep better and you'll get a sense of achievement.

Right now, we're all moving less than we would do normally so it's extra important that you add some exercise to your routine. It's even better if you can get outside for your government approved exercise and get fresh air too.

7. Tap into your senses

Mindfulness is about being in the present moment. Our senses are working all the time but we want to stop and notice them. Concentrating on your five senses means that you won't be worrying or thinking about any stress. Many typical self care activities work in this way such as taking a bath, listening to music, reading or meditating. Tapping into what you can taste, hear,

smell, touch and see can lead to the ultimate goal of feeling safe, relaxing you and boosting your mood.

8. Rest and recharge

Getting enough sleep is vital to maintain good physical and mental health. But it is also one of the things that can easily be affected by stress. Lack of sleep can also exacerbate our feelings of stress and worry. Your sleep can be improved by maintaining a routine of going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.

Make sure you have planned in enough 'downtime' in your routine. Ensure that within your day you have time for activities you find fun, enjoyable and relaxing. Several hours before your bedtime try and switch off from work, the news and other worries. Have a relaxing bath, read a book and try lavender oil to help you unwind.

9. Be kind to yourself

It is normal to feel strange right now because it is a strange, uncertain and anxious time. Accepting that you will feel all sorts of things and that there will be good and bad days goes a long way to maintaining your mental health and not exacerbating your stress.

10. Seek help

If you need help, please seek it out. [SHARE Museums East](#) have lots of resources to help you and your museum.

If you need someone to talk to, please call the Samaritans on 116 123. You do not have to be suicidal to call them, they offer confidential and non-judgemental emotional support whenever you need someone to talk to.

The [NHS Every Mind Matters website](#) and the [Mind website](#) have lots of resources including tips for sleep, anxiety and low mood, plus specific information for looking after your mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Bedfordshire

- You can self-refer to the [NHS Bedfordshire Wellbeing Service](#) who will get back in touch with you to arrange an assessment. They are currently offering webinars on 'Mental Wellbeing in Times of Uncertainty' which must be pre-booked.
- [Mind works across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes](#) offering a range of services including talking therapy and peer support groups.

Cambridgeshire

- You can self-refer to the [NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Psychological Wellbeing Service](#) who will get back in touch with you to discuss their therapy services.
- [Mind works across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#) offering counselling and their website features a lot of online support and self help guides.

Essex

- The NHS offers a range of services across Essex which can be accessed via the [Health in Mind website](#).

- There are several local Mind organisations working across Essex including [Basildon Mind](#), [Mid and North East Essex Mind](#), [Mind in West Essex](#), [Thurrock and Brentwood Mind](#), [Havering Mind](#) and [South East and Central Essex](#).

Hertfordshire

- You can self-refer to the [NHS Hertfordshire Wellbeing Service](#) who offer talking therapy and a wide range of workshops.
- The [Hertfordshire Mind Network](#) and [Mind in Mid Herts](#) offer counselling, peer support and workshops.

Norfolk

- You can self-refer to the [NHS Norfolk Wellbeing Service](#) who offer a wide range of services including talking therapies, group support, workshops and self-help resources.
- [The Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust](#) have a 24/7 helpline offering immediate advice, support and signposting for people with mental health difficulties. Call on 0808 196 3494.
- [Norfolk and Waveney Mind](#) offer a lot of support for adults and young people including counselling, mindfulness courses and support groups.

Suffolk

- You can self-refer to the [NHS Suffolk Wellbeing Service](#) who offer a wide range of services including talking therapies, group support, workshops and self-help resources.
- [The Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust](#) have a 24/7 helpline offering immediate advice, support and signposting for people with mental health difficulties. Call on 0808 196 3494.
- [Suffolk Mind](#) offer a range of talking therapies, courses and many online resources with lots of them especially useful during Covid-19.



WELLBEING

BECAUSE WE ALL HAVE MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Mentor

Offering a confidential, supportive service to help you improve your mental health. All appointments take place online or via telephone. I work with individuals and employers on a retainer basis.

Wellbeing Consultant

Working with businesses and organisations on wellbeing related projects including writing, project management, speaking and training.

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