

Wellbeing during Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a huge strain on each of us, whether we have personally had the virus or not. In this time of significant uncertainty, it's important to understand what we can do to support our wellbeing.

This guide looks at why the pandemic is affecting our mental health and wellbeing, what we can do to support our wellbeing from home, and how to tackle particular challenges.

How is the coronavirus pandemic affecting our wellbeing?

Why am I feeling so stressed and anxious?

Coronavirus COVID-19 is a new infection that has spread around the world in recent months. To prevent COVID-19 from spreading too quickly and too widely, governments have placed restrictions on what people can and cannot do. News about COVID-19 is constant, and the associated economic impacts and health effects of this virus are huge.

All these things can easily make us anxious and stressed. This is a natural response to crisis, when there are many unknown factors.

For some, the measures we are taking such as social distancing and self-isolation, along with travel restrictions, constant news alerts and financial stressors, may be overwhelming. **The negative impact on our wellbeing cannot be underestimated.**

How do I know if I'm stressed?

Though there are many factors at play in the ways we individually respond to the ongoing pandemic, we may all struggle from time to time as we experience the impact of coronavirus on our lives.

You might be experiencing:

- fear and worry about lack of connection and interaction with others and the impact this may have on mental health and wellbeing
- feelings of loneliness and isolation
- fear for your personal health and safety or anxiousness about your family or loved ones
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

- loss of power and control – ‘I didn’t choose this’
- lack of certainty – ‘How long will this situation last?’ ‘When will we return to normal life?’

In fact, stress can affect us in many ways, sometimes in ways we don’t notice. You might be experiencing:

- **Cognitive Symptoms** – such as reduced concentration, efficiency, and productivity, poor judgement, ‘brain fog’, indecision and self-doubt.
- **Emotional symptoms** – such as sadness, irritability and anger, cynicism, and frustration
- **Physical Symptoms** – such as a racing heart rate, tension headaches, jaw clenching, muscle spasms, frequent colds, indigestion, stomach aches, or diarrhoea
- **Behavioural symptoms** – such as increased use of alcohol or tobacco, withdrawal from others, disrupted sleep patterns, loss of sense of humour, or interpersonal problems like frequent arguments with family members.

If you have been noticing any of these symptoms, it’s possible that you may be experiencing a normal stress response to the coronavirus crisis.

Understanding stress

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from adverse circumstances. **Stress is a normal part of life and is a natural response** to an external pressure that disrupts your equilibrium. Stress can cause symptoms in several areas of the body and mind.

This is a tense time and most people will feel stressed at some point, whether it’s about losing a job, getting, protecting loved ones or managing the current general uncertainty in life. **It’s ok to feel worried and anxious – these feelings will pass.** The action you do next is what matters.

Tackling stress

Once you acknowledge your stress, identifying the cause or stressor will help you tackle the problem at hand. If used as a signal, your stress can motivate you to control what you can to help reduce your symptoms.

While there is no magic wand to make all of this go away, there are some protective steps we can take that will help us tackle stress and positively build our wellbeing as we continue to adjust to new and changing circumstances.

See our full guide on how to manage stress and anxiety for more information about this.

Improving your wellbeing

Building up our wellbeing is an important long-term strategy in stress management. If you have good mental wellbeing you can cope better with the inevitable stresses of life, and particularly the current crisis. Other benefits include:

- feeling relatively confident in yourself and have positive self-esteem
- being able to feel and express a range of emotions
- being able to build and maintain good relationships with others
- feeling more engaged with the world around you
- living and working productively

For more information on how to improve your wellbeing while stuck at home, read on for the **Five ways to wellbeing from Home**.

<https://guideposts.org.uk/wellbeing/covid-19/coronavirus-and-wellbeing/>

Please consider making a donation to Guideposts to help us continue with our work.
<https://guideposts.org.uk/support-us/>

Five ways to Wellbeing from Home

We've all been affected by the coronavirus in one way or another. Even if we've not experienced the virus first hand, weeks of lockdown and uncertainty have taken a toll on our mental health. You might have found yourself sleeping irregularly, feeling frustrated or bored, or more tired than usual. Or you might be feeling on edge with stress and anxiety about the future.

During this time, we're being told that it's more important than ever to take care of our own wellbeing, so that we can cope with the challenges that the coronavirus crisis brings. But what is wellbeing exactly, why is it important, and what can you do to improve it if you're isolated at home? This guide has the answers.

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing can be understood as how we feel and how we function, both on a personal and a social level, and how we evaluate our lives as a whole.

Wellbeing is defined as [the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy](#). However, it is important to realise that wellbeing is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does involve happiness, it also includes other things, such as our sense of purpose, how in control we feel, the ability to work productively and the opportunity to interact positively with others.

Our mental wellbeing is dynamic. It can change from moment to moment, day to day, month to month or year to year.

Unfortunately, during this current pandemic it's difficult to judge life positively and feel good about our circumstances. Additionally, it's not easy to maintain our wellbeing when we are forced to cope with the daily stresses of present life without being able to rely on our normal stress relievers such as playing sport, taking holidays/breaks or socialising with friends and family.

Still, there are many things we can do to support ourselves, even when stuck at home.

The “5 ways to wellbeing”

The [5 ways to wellbeing](#) are a set of evidence-based steps you can take to improve your wellbeing. Here’s a look at each of the steps and how you can achieve them at home:

Connect

Each of us has a fundamental need to connect with people socially and feel close to others. Unfortunately, it’s hard to do this when everyone has to stay at home – particularly if you live alone. Here are some ideas on what you can do:

- **Join a befriending service.** You can organise a weekly call with someone to talk about whatever you want. Some services also run group calls. [Find out more about befriending services here.](#)
- **Find people to chat to online.** You might want to join a [chat room](#) or [discussion forum](#) based on your interests.
- **Find a pen pal.** Some people prefer to make social contact through writing. But if you’d rather avoid the post office, consider joining an [email-based pen pal service](#).
- **Play a game with someone online.** Challenge a friend to an online game of [scrabble](#), [chess](#), [poker](#), or take part in a [virtual quiz](#).

Be active

Study after study shows that physical exercise can tackle low-level depression and anxiety, and it’s one of the first thing a GP will recommend if you show signs of depression. Here are some tips on staying active while at home:

- **Try out some gentle exercises.** If you don’t have much mobility or you can’t exercise rigorously because of a health condition, [there are lots of chair-based or low-impact exercises to try.](#)
- **Have a go at yoga or pilates.** [These exercises](#) are great for your mobility and strength and can be practised at different levels of intensity.
- **Want to stay active with just 10 minutes of exercise?** Try out the NHS’s [10-minute home workout](#).
- **Gardening is another way to be active!** If you’re not a confident gardener or you want ideas on gardening projects, [take a look at our gardening page](#).

Give

When we do something for others, we often feel better ourselves. It's important to feel like a valuable part of someone else's life, but it can be hard to know what you can do for others when you can't see them in person. Here are some ideas:

- **Join a telephone befriending service as a volunteer.** There are [a number of national befriending services](#) for different age groups. These services involve making a regular call to someone who's living alone and feeling isolated during this time.
- **Call a family member or long-lost friend.** Now is a brilliant time to get in touch with someone you've lost contact with and have a good catch up!
- **Volunteer with your local COVID-19 group.** These groups are continuing to provide food and other supplies to the most vulnerable, as well as offering to do odd jobs, such as gardening, from a safe distance.
- **Help someone out online.** There are a wide range of peer support forums with people looking for reassurance from someone who's been in a similar position to them. You can make a huge difference with just a few supportive words.
- **Donate to a charity supporting others during this time.** There are thousands of organisations across the country that would benefit from your support.

Take notice

It's very easy to be focused on the future right now. We're all second-guessing what's going to happen with our jobs, the economy, and when things might return to normal. This can easily lead to us to having feelings of stress and anxiety. A proven way to tackle this stress is to focus on the present moment and on your surroundings. Here's how you can do this from home:

- **Try to get outside for a walk each day.** Concentrate on the sights, sounds and smells you encounter on your walk. Taking photos on your journey is a good way to pay extra attention to how things look.
- **Take up gardening** – It's not just a good way to stay active – great way to immerse yourself in your surroundings while staying safe. [Here's the link to our gardening page](#) for ideas on projects you can do in your garden.
- **Have a go at drawing something in your house and garden.** You can use our drawing and painting guide to find some free resources on practising your drawing technique.

- **Try out mindfulness.** Mindfulness is the practice of being aware of the present and is a skill that you can get better at over time. For an accessible introduction what mindfulness is and how to get started, [click here](#).

Keep learning

Learning something new is a great way to build your self-esteem and tackle low mood. It's also a good way to be social with others. Thanks to the internet, there are lots of ways to learn something new from home:

- **Try out a free course online.** [There are lots of sites that offer free courses](#), ranging from just a few hours to a few weeks or months. It's a great way to pass the time and feel as though you've done something for yourself during this experience.
- **Learn a language.** You can access [a huge range of free resources for language learning online](#), or buddy up with someone abroad and do a language exchange. Language learning is a brilliant thing to do socially!
- **Learn an instrument.** If you've got a guitar or piano in your house that's been untouched for years, now is the time to finally get round to honing your skills. If you don't know where to start with learning an instrument, [take a look at our free guide](#).
- **Do a skill share.** Why not see what you can learn from your family and friends? Arrange to meet via Zoom or Whatsapp to teach each other a skill – even if it's a small practical skill that can be learned in just a few minutes.

Why stop here?

For more ideas on what you can do to stay well during isolation, take a look at our [Making Connections From Home](#) guide. It's a comprehensive list of all the ways you can connect with other people online or over the phone and exploring similar interests. It features more games you can play, courses you can join, virtual events to attend, and much more.

<https://guideposts.org.uk/wellbeing/covid-19/5-ways-to-wellbeing-from-home/>

Please consider making a donation to Guideposts to help us continue with our work.
<https://guideposts.org.uk/support-us/>

Tackling Compulsive News-Checking

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to manage the amount of news you read on a regular basis.

Most of us already had a problem with news consumption even before the COVID-19 pandemic. We're plagued by 24-hour news channels, constantly updating live feeds, and notifications from the news apps we've installed.

There are lots of reasons why this pattern of news consumption isn't helpful:

- **Keeping up to date with the news can become an obsession** – and this can drain a huge amount of your time, or leave you feeling anxious when you can't access the news.
- **Many news sources tend to speculate** – and create anxiety around possibilities that never happen.
- **Minor details are often made out to be more important than they really are** – this is a problem across all live news feeds, reporting on details that seem important and worrisome at the time, but later turn out not to be an issue.
- **Day-to-day news is full of sensational personal stories** – these tend to have nothing to do with your situation but are easy to get emotionally involved in and leave you feeling anxious or angry afterwards.

It is true that staying informed is one way many of us attempt to maintain a degree of control. **However, it is possible to stay informed about what matters without following the news all day, or even every day.** To take an example, for the first six or so weeks of lockdown, the official advice stayed the same, and it was possible to go through that period without reading the news at all.

Here are some tips on managing your consumption of news:

- **Stick to accurate information.** If you just want to stick to the information you need to take action on, use the [government's coronavirus information page](#) and the [NHS's coronavirus guide](#). Both of these are kept up to date with the latest guidance.
- **Turn off automatic notifications on your phone.** Even better, delete any news apps you have so that it's harder to quickly check the news.
- **Avoid 24/7 news channels and feeds.** As already explained, these tend to report on every detail and it can be difficult to sift out what is important information and what isn't. Furthermore, they're constantly updating and difficult to tear yourself away from.

- **Consider limiting how you use social media.** You might decide to view certain groups or pages but not scroll through timelines or newsfeeds. Though social media can help you stay in touch with people, it can also make you feel anxious particularly if people are sharing news stories or posting about their fears and concerns.
- **Consider limiting yourself to checking the news just once a day, or once every few days.** It can be easier to limit your news consumption if you make it part of your daily routine.

Finally, you might also want to consider limiting your children's exposure to news coverage of the pandemic, including social media. Children can easily misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

What should I check instead?

The best place to check for the latest guidance is the government's website. Here are some links to the key resources:

- Coronavirus (Covid-19): <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- Meeting with others safely (Social Distancing):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>
- Local restriction Tiers:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>
- Coronavirus (Covid-19) Staying Safe Online:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-staying-safe-online>
- Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>
- Guidance for households with grandparents and children living together where someone is at increased risk or has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/guidance-for-households-with-grandparents-parents-and-children-living-together-where-someone-is-at-increased-risk-or-has-symptoms-of-coronavirus-cov>
- Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>



Guideposts

Here for You

- COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people most likely to become unwell if they catch coronavirus: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-on-protecting-people-most-likely-to-get-unwell-from-coronavirus-shielding-young-peoples-version>

<https://guideposts.org.uk/wellbeing/covid-19/tackling-compulsive-news-checking/>

Please consider making a donation to Guideposts to help us continue with our work.
<https://guideposts.org.uk/support-us/>

www.guideposts.org.uk

0800 048 7035

Guideposts Trust Limited Registered in England No1282361 Registered Charity No272619
Guideposts Trust was established in 1972 and relies upon voluntary and financial support for its work

GIS@guideposts.org.uk | www.guideposts.org.uk
General Enquiries: 01993 893 560



Managing Uncertainty

These are exceptionally uncertain times. It's not clear when we might get a vaccine, whether infections will fall or rise, or what the state of the economy will look like in a few months or a year's time. Few of us are accustomed to this level of uncertainty, so it's important to have some strategies to manage it. Here are our top tips on focussing on the present and maintaining perspective in these times:

Keeping a Journal

Whether it's a spiral notebook, or a Word document on the computer, recognize that we are living through an historic event and it would be very interesting to look back someday on the coronavirus pandemic from your own perspective. Jotting down thoughts and feelings is also therapeutic, as writing allows you to offload feelings of anxiety, sadness, fear, or stress onto a piece of paper. This practice releases the effects of these emotions on your psychological and emotional health.

Staying Flexible

With the coronavirus crisis, no one really knows how it will unfold over time. This virus is novel, meaning it has never existed before. As we move through the cascading events together, it is good to remain as mentally flexible as possible. Try to avoid having firm expectations about how long we will have to remain at home or how the virus affects people. We will do better psychologically if we roll with events as they unfold, rather than having rigid expectations.

Stay connected with your values, don't let fear or anxiety drive your interactions with others, we are all in this situation together.

Taking time to relax and focus on the present

This can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future, and can improve wellbeing. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety. For useful resources go to the NHS Mindfulness page.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>

If you can, once a day get outside, or bring nature into your home. Spending time in green spaces can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing. If you can't get outside you can try to get these positive effects by spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see out of a window and get some natural sunlight, or get out into the garden if you can.

Finally, you may find our [dedicated guide on relaxation techniques](#) helpful.



Practice mindfulness

Acknowledging that feeling anxious at this point in time is normal. Fear and anxiety are adaptive responses as they alert us to the fact that we need to take appropriate action to keep ourselves and others safe and healthy

Becoming aware of the present moment can help you enjoy the world around you more and understand yourself better. When you become more aware of the present moment, you begin to experience afresh things that you have been taking for granted.

For a full guide to what mindfulness is, how it can help, and how to practise it, [click here](#).

<https://guideposts.org.uk/wellbeing/covid-19/managing-uncertainty/>

Please consider making a donation to Guideposts to help us continue with our work.
<https://guideposts.org.uk/support-us/>

www.guideposts.org.uk

0800 048 7035

Guideposts Trust Limited Registered in England No1282361 Registered Charity No272619
Guideposts Trust was established in 1972 and relies upon voluntary and financial support for its work

GIS@guideposts.org.uk | www.guideposts.org.uk
General Enquiries: 01993 893 560

