

10 ways to look after your mental health during lockdown

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If you're struggling with how you feel at the moment, you're not alone. The ongoing worry of the coronavirus pandemic plus a winter lockdown have left many people feeling stressed, isolated and under pressure.



Taking care of your mind as well as your body is vital when you're staying at home and it's normal to feel bored, frustrated, worried or lonely. But there are lots of things you can do to help you cope.

You can find expert advice and practical tips for looking after your mental health and well being on the NHS website [every mind matters.co.uk](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters.co.uk). Here are some ways to start.

1 MAKE A PRACTICAL PLAN

If you're unable to get to the shops for food and medicine, that can be a worry, so work out how you can get any supplies you need. Ask a neighbour or friend, find a delivery service or take a look at local Facebook groups offering mutual aid. If you have a doctor or hospital appointment booked in for existing physical or mental health issues, go if you can, and discuss how to continue receiving support.

2 KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Every one is missing their friends and family, and a good chat is one way to give yourself a boost. Sometimes it can be hard to admit you're struggling, so arrange to check in with one friend to see how they are – and they can do the same for you. And why not set up a WhatsApp group for friends and family who enjoy a particular TV show? It's a simple way to get together and have an "event" to look forward to.

3 TALK ABOUT YOUR WORRIES

It's normal to feel a bit scared about the current situation. And it's OK to share your concerns with others you trust – remember, doing so may help them talk about theirs too. But if you feel like you don't want to burden others who are having a hard time too, there are plenty of helplines you can try. The Samaritans offers confidential support: call free 24 hours a day on 116 123 or visit samaritans.org.

4 LOOK AFTER YOUR BODY

Our physical health has a big impact on how we feel. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour that end up making you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well balanced meals, drink enough water and stay active – and try to avoid smoking, drugs or drinking too much alcohol. Physical activity can help to boost your mood, but often it's the last thing you feel like doing when you just want to stay in bed and block out the day. There are lots of work outs you can do at home, so try to get into a habit when you're having a better day. An on line PE session first thing can give you a lift for the day ahead. Find a type of exercise you enjoy – that'll make it easier to motivate yourself. Write down how you feel at the start and then compare that with how you're doing afterwards. For more tips and support to look after your body, search NHS Better Health.

5 STAY ON TOP OF DIFFICULT FEELINGS

Remember, feeling worried about things just now is normal. But you might be experiencing intense anxiety that can affect your day-to-day life. If so, try to focus on the things you can control, such as how you act, who you speak to and where you get information from. Try some ideas to help manage your taking extra time to look after your own health is one thing you can control, so concentrate on the small things you can do to make the situation better. For tips and advice to cope with difficult feelings, search Every Mind Matters.

6 AVOID OVER WHELM ING YOURSELF WITH NEWS

It's tempting to “doom scroll” on your phone the moment you wake up or just before you go to sleep, but this will only add to your stress. Set your self a specific time to read updates, and be mindful of how you are consuming news depending on your mental health. Be wary of and fact check any information you see on social media. If you feel you're going down a rabbit hole of bad news, set your timer for 15 minutes and do something else (that's where cleaning can be very therapeutic!)

7 CHECK YOUR EMPLOYMENT AND BENEFITS RIGHTS

Work and money are a big worry while you have to stay home, and this can affect your mental health. Talk to your employer if necessary. Also find out about Government support for businesses and self-employed people, and understand your sick pay and benefits rights.

8 CARRY ON DOING THINGS YOU ENJOY

If you feel worried or low, you may stop doing things you usually enjoy. Make an effort to focus on your favourite hobby if you can still do it at home. Or start a new one: do crosswords or jig saws, bake, or try drawing and painting. Don't underestimate the power of sitting under a blanket with a good book, bingeing on a feel-good Netflix show or blasting out some music while you're tidying the house.

9 TAKE TIME TO RELAX

Home used to be a place for rest and relaxation, but after nearly a year of spending so much time there, it's no wonder it's becoming harder to find the head space to switch off. If you're working from home, try to set limits on your day: log off and enjoy a lunchtime walk, and spend evenings away from the laptop. And make sure weekends feel different, whether you take the opportunity to enjoy a home spa experience, board games with the kids or a refreshing afternoon nap. Practice relaxation techniques to help with difficult emotions - check out the Every Mind Matters website.

10 AND GET SOME GOOD SLEEP

Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how you feel, so it's important to get enough. Try to maintain your regular sleeping pattern, even though it's tempting to let routine go out of the window when you're at home all the time.