

Small Charities Coalition

Informing | Supporting | Connecting



Guide To Better Mental Health & Wellbeing during COVID-19

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Introduction

During these uncertain times, our minds are being tested more than ever. As our home lives begin to intertwine with our work lives, we can lose focus and become anxious. Within this guide, we look to resolve some of these stresses by offering tips that are both inexpensive and effective. These are small changes that can create big differences to your mental health and wellbeing.

- **Working from Home**
- **Friends, Family & Community**
- **Exercise: Healthy Body, Healthy Mind**
- **You**



Working from Home

Find a routine

Building a routine you can stick to in your working from home life may not sound important. However for many people, routine can take the guesswork and uncertain bits out of your day.

- **Set yourself up in the right way and do the usual.** Get dressed, brush your teeth, because by physically doing something, you are flipping the switch.
- **We find ourselves outside of the usual structures of a working day. In order to be productive it is important to impose this structure on yourself.** For example, working in 45-60 minute chunks of focused work followed by a short break. This is an easy and effective way of **breaking up the day and maintaining concentration levels.**
- **Try and stick to the working hours.** During these challenging times, routine helps us to cope with change, to form healthy habits, and to reduce our stress levels.
- **If you do live with others, try creating a communal space to work in.**

Communication with colleagues

Although many of us find it easier to write out emails, speaking with colleagues over the phone can be helpful for our mental health for two reasons:

1. **It stimulates your brain** - it takes you away from a screen and allows for social interaction, of which there are limited amounts in the current climate. Even if there is limited amount on your works agenda, try setting up a daily call with a set time.
2. **Stress relief** - As we are working in isolation, we can become overwhelmed with the workload, extensive email threads and to-do lists. In order to stay productive and focused, and to avoid miscommunication, set up a call. A problem shared is a problem halved. If you find yourself misinterpreting work, follow this link for top tips. <https://www.fastcompany.com/40537188/how-to-avoid-the-5-most-common-misunderstandings-at-work>

You can find Small Charities Coalition's guides to using remote working apps here <https://www.smallcharities.org.uk/covid-legal-and-technical-advice/>



Boost your productivity

With house pets and children becoming the new distraction during the COVID-19 outbreak, it is important to try and find some focus. Each home will differ. However there are small things you can change to help encourage better focus, greater productivity and stronger mental health.

- **Reduce your eye strain by follow the 20-20-20 rule.** Every twenty minutes, stop looking at your screen. Stare at something 20 yards away and hold it for 20 seconds.
- **Social media is designed to make it easy for us to access and use.** And with more people than ever now using these channels, it can have an impact on your wellbeing and productivity levels. Try removing them from browser short-cuts, log out of accounts. You might consider working primarily in private browsers e.g. Firefox. This ensures you stay signed out of accounts and doesn't auto-complete the word you're typing.
- **With the turning tides of COVID-19, daily tasks can change in an instant.** If you can, try solidifying your schedule the night before. It makes the following day feel more official.
- **To maximize productivity in your workspace, create a setup that mimics elements of an actual office.** Some starting points: Make sure you have a strong internet connection, good lighting, a comfy chair, and an inventory of supplies so you're not wasting time looking for stuff
- **To capitalize on your most productive periods, save your harder tasks for when you know you'll be in the right headspace for them.** Use slower points of the day to knock out the easier, logistical tasks that are also on your plate.
- **Be kind to yourself** - Some days you may not achieve as much as you had hoped. It is easy to become overwhelmed with feelings of failure. In this sense, it is important for your wellbeing that you set realistic expectations. Try creating a detailed, daily to-do list that includes both work tasks and designated self-care time. This creates discipline.



Family, Friends & Community

It can be frustrating not being able to spend time with friends or family. Similarly to keeping in touch with colleagues, it is crucial to your mental health to keep a strong social network. Have you reflected on yours? There are plenty of free apps to keep you better connected. Download and enjoy.

1. **Bunch:** <https://bunch.live/> - Allows up to 8 friends per chat, games included.
2. **House Party:** <https://houseparty.com/> - Allows up to 8 friends, games included.
3. **Google Hangout:** <https://hangouts.google.com/> - You need a gmail account, but allows up to 25 people per call.
4. **Zoom:** <https://zoom.us/download> - It allows for up to 100 people per call (you can add 500 more on their expanded version)

Helping your community safely

There are plenty of ways to still help your community during the crisis. Helping others not only contributes to the wellness of your local area, but also helps with your wellbeing by giving you purpose. Here is what you can do:

1. **The single biggest help is by practising social distancing and staying at home.** Reducing day to day contact with those who live outside your home is the most effective way of reducing the spread of infection and saving lives. If you do visit those outside of your home, remember the 2m/ 6 feet distancing rule.
2. **You can also help by collecting medication or food supplies for neighbours.** Using plastic gloves when collecting these items to deliver to others is an effective way of ensuring that you are not contaminating anything. If you are without gloves, ensure you wash your hands before you leave and after you return from outside of your home.
3. **If you feel like you can help further, there are a few ways to volunteer within your local community.**
 - **NHS:** There has already been 500,000 sign ups to helping our NHS. Jobs include: delivering medicines from pharmacies; driving patients to appointments; bringing them home from hospital; and making regular phone calls to check on people isolating at home. To sign up and help check their website.
 - **Covid-19 Mutual Aid:** This was set up to co-ordinate “good neighbour” initiatives and has lists of local groups in your area, together with details of how to help people safely. Check out their website for details.



Exercise: Healthy Body, Healthy Mind

The benefits of exercise to your mental health and wellbeing cannot be underestimated. At this delicate time, our energy is essential and it is influenced by numerous factors; our routine, our environment, the food and information we digest. SCC spoke with Nike's top physical trainer, Emmanuel Ovola, on how you can make the most of out of the limited time and space we have for exercise. Here are his top tips and facts:

1. **Set your day up from the beginning.** It's essential you create energy by fuelling it the right way. If the body has enough fuel you can start a movement routine.
2. **Initially, exercise requires a routine as our mind will try and do what is at the forefront of our thoughts.** Routine creates a habit this is a great way to relieve your mind.
3. **Create an environment that provides you with enough space** to exercise and ensure your household are aware that you will be exercising.
4. **Movement needs to be effective for the time that you have,** don't be too concerned if you don't feel that you have worked your "hardest".
5. **Build the consistency** that will create a long term lifestyle change.
6. **Find an online resource to assist with your exercise and don't worry if you don't use it more than once.** Moderate exercise of up to 60 minutes can improve your immune system function by 43%.
7. **Increasing our step rate is important, but there may not need to be a specific step target.** Research by Pedro et al 2020 has identified that raising steps from 4,000 – 8,000 was associated with 50% lower risk of death.
8. **Government guidelines recommends at least 150 minutes of exercise per week.** If aged between 19-64 years, this means you only need to do 22 minutes of moderate exercise per day.
9. **Stress and anxiety created by external factors** can have a profound effect on the immune system.
10. **Discomfort can sometimes be present after a bout of exercise, but it is important to not get too anxious about this.** With the reduced amount of walking and activity our body will be slightly more sensitive to activity.
11. **If you feel sore keep moving and active.** Discomfort can last up to 3 days depending on the structure that is affected.



You can find exercise workouts available online for free. Here are some easy and free ways to help your body and mind:

- **[Sport England's 10 Today](#)**: These 10 minute audio workouts can be tuned into via radio. If you can't make it, you can catch up online.
- **[Nike Training Club](#)**: They provide free workouts, nutrition advice and expert help. They even provide personal training programmes. Available on Apple and Android: you can do this all in the comfort of your own home.
- **[The NHS](#)**: There are plenty of ways to exercise for free. The NHS gives guides on everything from standing abs workout to sofa workouts. Having a fit body and strong mind doesn't have to be expensive.



You

Between ticking off work to-do lists and scheduling calls with relatives, it can feel like there's a lot to manage. At times this can be overwhelming, but remember that it is also a time to reflect, learn or relearn what makes you happiest. Taking time out of your day to do what you like is crucial to maintaining a healthy mind. If you are unsure of what exactly those are, below you can find some suggestions on how to harness your happiness and wellbeing.

Meditation during isolation

Physical exercise is a great outlet for supporting your mental health, however you can build up a healthy mind using less exertion. Meditation is a fantastic outlet for better wellbeing. Not only that, but it is free, easy and time flexible.

Top tips for Meditation

- **Start early:** By doing it first thing in the morning, you get it done and don't bump it off the to-do list. Morning meditation is a nice way to begin your day – refreshed, awake and ready for a mindful day.
- **Same time, same place:** You don't have to meditate in the morning but try and make a commitment to yourself that you do it at the same time and in the same place. As previously mentioned, practising a routine creates a lasting habit and a healthy mind.
- **Get creative:** Although it is recommended that you find the same spot, sometimes this isn't possible. The easy thing about meditation is that it can be practised anywhere. Try it on a walk or in the park, anywhere you can't be disturbed.
- **Experiencing discomfort:** People who are new to meditation can often experience negative emotions like restlessness, anxiety and irritation while practicing. Try not to resist these emotions, but rather give them your full attention and allow them to come and then go. As time progresses, the mind learns to recognise these thoughts and emotions but gets used to not getting entangled in these negative patterns. It can be hugely beneficial in your day to day, but can also help with the rest of your life.
- **Carry on the mindfulness:** Before you finish meditating and go about your day, form a clear idea of what you are going to do next. Maybe you'll shower or read the newspaper. Whatever the activity, try to carry on the mindfulness you cultivated during your meditation throughout the day.

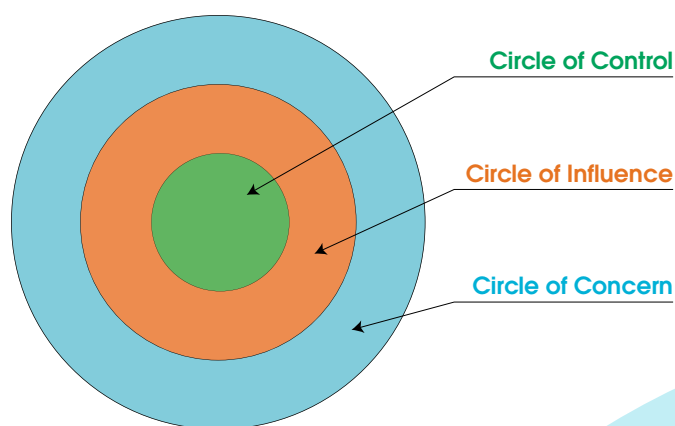
Helpful apps:

- **Insight Timer:** Insight Timer has a huge library of content: over 25,000 guided meditations from around 3,000 teachers on topics like stress, relationships, creativity, and more.
- **Smiling Mind:** The app features hundreds of meditations, enough to keep you engaged without overwhelming you with choice. While you could use a meditation app as a temporary break from your hectic life, Smiling Mind wants you to take your mindfulness practice off the cushion and into the other 23 hours of your day.
- **Headspace:** Headspace offers 'sleep-based guided meditation' which features different techniques to 'help relax the body and mind and let go of the day'.

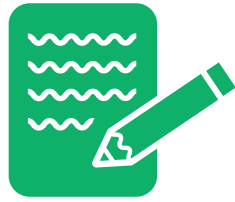
How to build resilience

Resilience is bouncing back from challenges and adversity. It is not about never experiencing difficulties, but about coming back to a positive place of psychological wellbeing. Resilience is an important skill that protects your wellbeing. It is partly personality based, but there are skills that can be learnt and harnessed.

- **An important foundation of resilience is understanding what you can and can't change.**
- **There may be something that has gone wrong and it is not clear how it is going to work out** – this uncertainty created discomfort and unease – this can escalate quickly.



- **Worrying can be helpful** (to an extent) as it can motivate action and may solve the problem.
- **Nevertheless, if you are constantly worrying about trying to change things you don't have control over this can be unproductive and can have serious effects on your wellbeing.**
- **It is important to focus on the things you can influence** and change within the situation (even if a large part of it is out of your control).
- **A sense of purpose will remind yourself why you're doing something.** This will help you focus on what your purpose is and ensure your values are aligned. It helps you to face up to adversity and pull you through difficult times.



Get creative!

It's finally time get those old paintbrushes and that dusty keyboard down from the loft. Getting creative is hugely beneficial to our mental health. When we are being creative, our minds typically enter a state of flow; essentially, we become absorbed by what we are doing, and the creative act takes over our mind. At the stage of flow, it boosts our mental state and even slows the heart rate down, which makes it particularly helpful for those who may suffer from anxiety or depression. Remember, you don't need to be the best painter or creator to reap the benefits of creativity. There are plenty of ways to be inspired by the world around you. However, if you're in need of some help, here are some apps to inspire:

- **HaikuJam:** If you like writing, why not be collaborative? The idea is that it gets you writing stories and poetry for other people – friends and strangers alike – and you get to read others' attempts!
- **Paper by Fiftythree:** Like an artist's sketchbook, but digital. There is a range of pens and tools to scribble, doodle, write. Diagrams to artworks, whatever you like.
- **BrainSparker** For those unsure of exactly where you can find your creative nature, give BrainSparker a go. It gives random prompt cards to activate and ignite your imagination. This way you can unleash you best ideas to bring about the best of your wellbeing.

Who else can help?

Although we can implement structure and purpose to help support our mental health, sometimes things can become too much. If you find yourself in such a position, there are a many mental health charities who are able to help. Don't know where to look? Here are some useful websites:

- <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- <https://mentalhealth-uk.org/about-us/our-founding-charities/>
- <https://www.rethink.org/>
- www.anxiety.org.uk
- www.samaritans.org.uk
- www.sane.org.uk/support