

Mental Health and Coronavirus

There are many pressures on our mental health with constant reports of coronavirus in the news and enveloping our daily lives. As humans we are wired to keep ourselves safe from threat, so when confronted with negativity or a potential threat, our brains activate more intensely than they do for an equally positive experience.

1. Notice it – pay attention to your thoughts and feelings
2. Accept and don't judge it – allow yourself to feel things. It's a time of uncertainty and it's very normal to think and feel a vast range of things in response to this. Don't try to ignore or suppress it.
3. Try a few different things to see if anything helps you to feel more positive and more in control.

1. What to look out for in yourself and others?

We can experience physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms, examples include:

- muscle tension
- crying or feeling teary
- disrupted sleep
- tight chest
- increased heart rate
- lack of motivation
- lack of energy
- withdrawal
- changes in appetite
- imagining negative things about the future – 'what if...'
- obsessive news reading

2. Acceptance and non-judgement

These are all really normal things to think and feel. It's really important not to judge yourself. Allow yourself to feel things. You are human and it's perfectly normal.

3. What can I do to look after my mental health?

- Try to avoid speculation and look up reputable sources on the outbreak
 - Use one or two credible sources to gather information
 - Only look at the news once or twice per day
 - Rumour and speculation fuel anxiety, having good quality information regarding coronavirus can make you feel more in control
 - You can get up to date information on the gov.uk website
 - Introduce a ban on googling symptoms or googling coronavirus – stick to a news app
 - Avoid social media or tabloid click-bait which will sensationalise to induce fear
- Stay connected
 - Use technology to check in with friends and family – social connection is important
 - If working from home, remember to pick up the phone or try a skype call
 - Remember you can contact a helpline for emotional support, such as Samaritans and Mind

- Stick to a daily routine
 - If you're working from home and/or self-isolating, try introducing a routine similar to one you would have on a work day, including a shower, getting dressed and taking a lunch break. It's easy to let home and work blur into one when working from home so it's important to keep boundaries in place.
 - Some people find it beneficial to write a list at the start of the day to focus their activity.

- Get lots of sleep, exercise and good food
 - Eat a balanced diet, ideally with lots of veggies to keep your vitamins and minerals up
 - Exercise, this can be a dance around the house or a run up and down the stairs (why not try mini circuits including star jumps, running on the spot and sit ups). YouTube have lots of free online workout videos. Of course, make sure it's appropriate for your level of fitness and don't push yourself too hard.
 - Get early nights wherever possible
 - Try not to self-medicate with alcohol, this will usually make you feel worse in the long run.

- Treat yourself
 - Have a bath
 - Watch a film
 - Listen to your favourite album
 - Read a book
 - Play your favourite game

- Focus on controlling the controllables
 - Rather than thinking about all the unknowns, focus on everything that you do have control over.
 - Is there a bit of work you've been meaning to get round to doing?
 - Is there something in the house or garden you could focus on completing?
 - Aim to identify small, specific, achievable tasks. This helps you to feel a sense of control, achievement and accomplishment at a time of uncertainty.

- Practice mindfulness
 - Yoga stretches or breathing exercises (YouTube have some great breathing technique videos)
 - Reflect on things that you are grateful for, write a list
 - Focus on things that make you happy - enjoy a piece of music and really listen to it, giving it your full attention. Eat something nice and pay attention to the full flavour and texture profile.

- Have a go at using balancing statements
 - For every negative thought you have, or for every negative thing you say, try balancing it out with a positive thing, for example:
 - Gosh what if we run out of food | What a great challenge to be creative and use up everything we have, it's a good way to get rid of all those tins.
 - How are we going to get through 2+ weeks together, they'll do my head in | What a great opportunity to spend quality time together as a family, I'm always complaining that I don't see them enough – now is my chance.
 - Everyone is being so horrible and selfish stockpiling supplies | I understand that people are scared and it's natural to panic. Look at all the wonderful acts of kindness and humanity in the news. I will focus on being as compassionate as possible.