



Supporting your mental health following adjustments due to Covid-19

Due to measures in place because of the current pandemic, many of us are placed in circumstances where we have had to significantly adapt our daily lifestyles, and this change can feel overwhelming, uniquely affecting the ways in which we may think, feel and behave. These mental and emotional experiences are also known as 'psychological effects'. How we respond to change is completely individual, and experiences of the current circumstances will also be individual, depending on aspects such as how resilient we're feeling or how prepared we feel. For some people, this may be the first encounter of feeling a bit out of sorts or noticing a change within your mental wellbeing.

As humans, we are naturally curious beings: We seek to predict, understand and control situations or events, which helps us learn and keep safe. The idea of not knowing, especially in a context like this, can feel threatening because we are unable to accurately predict, understand and control what will happen and as a result, we experience psychological effects.

It is important to note that feeling uncomfortable and uncertain of any change is normal and quite natural, however for some people, uncertainty & change can feel unbearable. Finding it tricky to cope with experiencing change could lead to more long-standing psychological effects. For example: If uncertainty around change can feel dangerous or threatening, this may feed worry and anxiety causing trouble to sleep at night.

What are common issues people face as a result of adjustments due to Covid-19?

Research has shown a number of common issues experienced by people during health pandemics, these include feelings of:

Stress	Worry
Fear	Low mood
Confusion	Boredom
Anger	Frustration
Struggle to remain optimistic	Obsessive thoughts/behaviours*
Loneliness	Low self-esteem

*It is possible to begin to notice that you're experiencing frequent thoughts or almost uncontrollable behaviours related to Covid-19: It could be that you can't stop thinking about the virus or not wanting to catch it, and as a result you're washing your hands repeatedly (significantly more than guidance suggests), for longer than 20 seconds. This is more of a moderate issue that relates to anxiety and may require slightly more in-depth cognitive behavioural therapy to manage these feelings.

Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 16 April 2020:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/16april2020>

What can I do to manage my mental health?

Explore your worries or feelings. help yourself to explore your feelings safely, keep a mood journal and reflect on how you cope day to day, think of ways you could do things differently, set realistic goals and help yourself work towards them, and if you don't succeed the first time, remember you can always try again. Reach out to others for support where necessary.

Look after your body. Try to be proactive in eating a balanced and nutritious diet every day, and eat at least 3 meals a day, with 1-2 litres of water. Also focus on how you can be more active, making time in your day to stretch your body, and let your mind breathe is vital to elevating your emotional wellbeing. Try to introduce a 15-30-minute activity into your daily routine, whether walking, running, doing some yoga or going for a bike ride. Exercising releases endorphins, which increases mood and general positive thinking.

Practice gratitude. At times of uncertainty, engaging in gratitude practice can help to re-connect with feelings of joy and positivity. At the end of each day, take time to reflect on what you have been thankful for during that day. Try to be specific and look out for the little things; It was sunny at lunchtime, my plant has started to grow, I enjoyed my dinner.

Set a routine. If you are spending more time at home it is important to continue with a regular routine. Maintain a regular time for waking up and going to bed, eating at regular times, and getting ready and dressed each morning. You could use a timetable to give structure to your day.

Become more socially connected. Whilst we have had to physically distance ourselves from others during this time, we are social beings and thrive from social connection. Reach out to loved ones via platforms such as: telephone calls, text messaging, video calls and social media platforms. This will help combat loneliness or distress we may experience when physically isolated. Perhaps think about how you can create regular ways of linking with people whether that be a group weekly video chat, or a telephone call with a loved one at the same time each week.

Try to be more mindful. Recognising the signs when we are experiencing mental stress means that we can help ourselves to stay safe and well. If our brains become too overloaded, or we reach a point of exhaustion, it can be detrimental to our health. Try finding 5-10 minutes in your day to stop and take a breath. Stand or sit somewhere quiet where you can breathe in fresh air, and relax your mind for a moment. Try to heighten your senses and feel grounded. If it helps, try using the web-based app Just6 for mindfulness and relaxation you can access in the palm of your hand.

Useful Links

Seven Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ie/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201504/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-gratitude>

The Secret Benefits of Routines: <https://www.headspace.com/blog/2016/08/22/the-secret-benefit-of-routines-it-wont-surprise-you/>

83 Benefits of Journaling for Depression, Anxiety and Stress: <https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-journaling/>

Where can I go for more help?

Talk Together Bromley

Talk Together Bromley is a free NHS evidence-based service in Bromley offering Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and counselling. You can self-refer directly to the service via telephone or their website. The service is designed to support people who may be experiencing mild-moderate difficulties with their mental health, including feelings of stress, anxiety and low mood/depression.

Website: www.talktogetherbromley.co.uk

Telephone: 0300 003 3000



NHS Fitness Studio

The NHS have a range of self-help guides online to help you the move gently, and build confidence with movement in the comfort of your own home. Including exercises for strength, flexibility and balance. Search NHS Fitness Studio, or website to download their free exercise guides now

Website:



Every Mind Matters

Online platform providing expert advice and practical tips around how to maintain your wellbeing. Includes specific tailored support around managing mental health during the coronavirus pandemic and also offers an online tailored 'mind plan' depending on your needs.

Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>



Big White Wall

Big White Wall is an online community for people who are stressed, anxious or feeling low. The service has an active forum with round-the-clock support from trained professionals. You can talk anonymously to other members and take part in group or one-to-one therapy with therapists.



Samaritans

A national helpline providing free and confidential listening support to individuals who are struggling with low mood, stress, anxiety and depression, and callers do not have to be suicidal to make contact.

Telephone: 116 123 (Open 24/7)

Website: www.samaritans.org



Shout

Shout line is the free, 24/7, confidential text message service for people in crisis. Text **SHOUT** to **85258** to text with a trained crisis volunteer.



If you feel in crisis, tell someone. Text 'HELP' to 85258 for crisis counselling, ring Samaritans on 116 123 for listening support, or the Oxleas Urgent Advice Line on 0800 330 8590 for practical advice, all accessible 24/7. If you feel at risk to yourself, likely to cause harm or complete suicide phone 999-Ambulance immediately.

Creating my routine

✓	<u>Morning</u>
	Wake up at _____
	Mindfulness/gratitude/gentle stretches (a mindful activity)
	Eat Breakfast at _____
	Look at what you have achieved the day before from a 'have done' list
	Write down three tasks/goals you would like to achieve for the day
	Plan in regular breaks for the day, including times for lunch and dinner
	Begin tasks

✓	<u>Afternoon</u>
	Have lunch at _____
	Short physical activity (walking/stretching)
	Mindfulness exercise
	Add to 'have done' list
	Think about which tasks to focus on for rest of afternoon

✓	<u>Evening</u>
	Set a stop time for _____
	Engage in daily physical activity if you haven't already
	Prepare dinner (with others in your household where relevant)
	Add to 'have done' list
	Watch TV
	Read a book
	Come away from Mobile/Computer/TV an hour before sleep
	Complete gratitude journal for the day (three positive things)
	Decide to sleep at _____

Challenging Your Thoughts

The **Take Your Thought to Court** activity is one you can utilise to challenge unhelpful thoughts. It uses the metaphor of a court trial with; A defence barrister – defending the truth of the unhelpful thought and a prosecutor – undermining the truth of the unhelpful thought. Gathering evidence in this manner allows you to assess how realistic and helpful the thought actually is.

What is the Negative thought? Choose an unhelpful thought from step one that caused the most emotional distress	Defence What suggests that the thought is true? What are the facts and evidence?	Prosecution What suggests that this thought is false? What evidence is there to discredit this thought?

Step 3: Increase balanced and helpful ways of thinking

Our thoughts can negatively impact us in many ways; the purpose of this final step is to develop a more helpful and balanced way of thinking, in turn improving how you feel. You are not disregarding the initial unhelpful thought, you are just weighing up all of the evidence for and against this thought to get to an alternative perspective.

Verdict
Given the evidence, what is a more helpful, balanced way of viewing this thought? Outline your new way of thinking. If a friend were in a similar situation, what would you advise?

Next Steps...

Following these three steps, think back to the situation you were in when you had the initial unhelpful thought. In your head, replace the initial unhelpful thought with the new more helpful thought and explore how this thought might change the intensity of the emotion you felt at the time, and how you subsequently behaved. It might be that the first few times you try this the distress only reduces slightly but the more you practice this way of thought challenging, the intensity of the unhelpful thoughts should lessen and the associated emotional distress should decrease.

A Mindfulness exercise

The 'five senses' mindfulness exercise is a relatively easy one that can be practiced anywhere quickly, helping to bring you to a mindful state, aware of the present moment:

1. Notice five things that you can **see** - Look around you and bring your attention to five things that you can see. Pick something that you don't normally notice, like a shadow or a small crack in the concrete.



2. Notice four things that you can **feel** - Bring awareness to four things that you are currently feeling, like the texture of your pants, the feeling of the breeze on your skin, or the smooth surface of a table you are resting your hands on



3. Notice three things you can **hear** - Take a moment to listen, and note three things that you hear in the background. This can be the chirp of a bird, the hum of the refrigerator, or the faint sounds of traffic from a nearby road.



4. Notice two things you can **smell** - Bring your awareness to smells that you usually filter out, whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. Perhaps the breeze is carrying a whiff of pine trees if you're outside or the smell of a fast food restaurant across the street.



5. Notice one thing you can **taste** - Focus on one thing that you can taste right now, at this moment. You can take a sip of a drink, chew a piece of gum, eat something, notice the current taste in your mouth, or even open your mouth to search the air for a taste.



Relaxation Techniques

Paint a picture of the calming place in your mind. Don't just think of the place briefly—imagine every little detail. Go through each of your senses and imagine what you would experience in your relaxing place. Here's an example using a beach:

- a. Sight: The sun is high in the sky and you're surrounded by white sand. There's no one else around. The water is a greenish-blue and waves are calmly rolling in from the ocean.
- b. Sound: You can hear the deep pounding and splashing of the waves. There are seagulls somewhere in the background.
- c. Touch: The sun is warm on your back, but a breeze cools you down just enough. You can feel sand moving between your toes.
- d. Taste: You have a glass of lemonade that's sweet, tart, and refreshing.
- e. Smell: You can smell the fresh ocean air, full of salt and calming aromas.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

During the fight-or-flight response, the tension in our muscles increases. This can lead to a feeling of stiffness, or even back and neck pain. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches us to become more aware of this tension so we can better identify and address stress.

Find a private and quiet location. You should sit or lie down somewhere comfortable.

The idea of this technique is to intentionally tense each muscle, and then to release the tension. Let's practice with your feet.

- a. Tense the muscles in your toes by curling them into your foot. Notice how it feels when your foot is tense. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
- b. Release the tension from your toes. Let them relax. Notice how your toes feel differently after you release the tension.
- c. Tense the muscles all throughout your calf. Hold it for 5 seconds. Notice how the feeling of tension in your leg feels.
- d. Release the tension from your calf, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs.

Follow this pattern of tensing and releasing tension all throughout your body. After you finish with your feet and legs, move up through your torso, arms, hands, neck, and head.