Bilbrook Medical Centre

An A to Z of how to look after your emotional wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic

Our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

The current coronavirus pandemic may be causing emotions you have experienced before to resurface, or new feelings of anxiety, stress or low mood to appear.

Even if you feel you are coping well it is still better to be armed with some tools to help manage your mental health through this challenging time.

We all need to look after our emotional wellbeing and there are lots of things we can do to help with this.

**A**ccurate information.

Ensure information you are looking at is from an accurate source. There will be plenty of inaccurate information on social media which can lead to increased fear and anxiety.

[www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19)

**B**reathing.

Breathing exercises can really help us in times of anxiety. They can reduce the cycle of anxiety which can lead to panic attacks and be a useful tool to use when you are aware of stressful feelings emerging.

You can find a range of techniques online but a simple one is the 7:11 breathing exercise:

Breathe in for a count of 7 seconds through your nose.

Hold for a couple of seconds

Then breathe out through your mouth for a count of 10 seconds

Repeat

There are examples on YouTube to show you how to do exercises like these.

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress)

**C**hildren.

It can be hard to know what to say to children during this confusing time.

They are likely to pick up on the emotions of others around them as well as information in the media.

There are things we can do to help children cope and minimize the negative impact on them.

It is important to acknowledge their feelings in a safe supportive space and to be able to correct any incorrect ideas they may have about the virus.

Useful resources are:

[www.bbc.co.uk/newsround#more-stories-2](http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround#more-stories-2)

This has a section on “Advice if you’re worried about the coronavirus” as well as Dr Xand and Dr Chris answering children’s coronavirus questions

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/talking-to-children](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/talking-to-children)

**D**iet.

This is a really important time to think about how we eat.

Our immune system is complex and many factors affect its function. Lots of these factors are affected by our lifestyle.

One thing you can control immediately is the health of the trillions of microbes lining your gut known as the microbiome.

Recent research has shown that the gut microbiome plays an essential role in the body’s immune responses to infection and in maintaining overall health.

Key points:

* Eat a wide range of plant based foods
* Limit processed foods (cook from scratch where possible)
* A Mediterranean diet has been shown to be the best diet for our health and improves the health of our gut bacteria
* Eat a variety of vegetables, fruit, nuts, seeds, wholegrains and healthy fats like olive oil, along with lean meat and fish
* You might like to find out more about how to keep your gut healthy with probiotics and fermented foods
* If you are concerned about getting hold of fresh produce at the moment, remember frozen fruit and vegetables are excellent, as are canned pulses and beans

[www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/what\_should\_you\_eat\_for\_a\_healthy\_gut](http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/what_should_you_eat_for_a_healthy_gut)

**E**xercise

Exercise and activity are very beneficial for our mental wellbeing.

It reduces feelings of low mood, anxiety and stress related symptoms.

Even though many of us will be practicing social distancing or be self-isolating we can still incorporate exercise into our lives and feel the benefit.

Make exercise part of your routine and that of your household.

There are many online exercise regimes to follow to suit your fitness level and interests.

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-to-using-exercise](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-to-using-exercise)

Fitness coach Joe Wicks is doing daily “PE” sessions for children:

[www.thebodycoach.com/blog/pe-with-joe-1254.html](http://www.thebodycoach.com/blog/pe-with-joe-1254.html)

For those who are only able to exercise in a chair there are chair based exercise routines available:

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises)

**F**amily and friends

It will be difficult not having the usual face to face contact with extended family and friends but there are ways to keep in touch and technology will play an increasingly important role in this.

Use group messaging apps on your smart device keep in touch regularly.

Consider having a specific timed get together perhaps to do a family quiz. You could arrange to watch a film at the same time with friends. Check online for the inventive and fun ways people are using technology to keep in touch and communicate.

Use the telephone. Call regularly to check on friends and family and by doing so provide social and emotional support.

**G**reen spaces

Exposure to green spaces and nature has been shown to provide significant benefits for mental health and wellbeing.

Try to incorporate some time outside in nature each day whilst practicing social distancing. This could be a local park, dog walk or nearby fields. If you are self-isolating even being in your garden if you are lucky enough to have one will help.

If you don’t have a garden and are self-isolating spend time with the windows open, look out on a view and think about using houseplants to create your own green space.

**H**elp

Although we hope there are many useful tips here, there may be times when you really need to ask for extra help and support.

The way you access Bilbrook Medical Centre may have changed but we are still here to speak to you if you feel you are not coping with your mental health.

There are a number of ways to access help if you are struggling with your emotional health and need further advice:

Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline:

0808 800 2234

Text 07860 022821

Email [Staffordshire.helpline@brighter-futures.org.uk](mailto:Staffordshire.helpline@brighter-futures.org.uk)

[www.brighter-futures.org.uk/staffordshire-mental-health-helpline](http://www.brighter-futures.org.uk/staffordshire-mental-health-helpline)

Samaritans:

Call 116 123

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

Sane:

[www.sane.org.uk/support](http://www.sane.org.uk/support)

They provide support through a texting service, peer support in a forum and a phone line

0300 304 7000

MIND:

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

0300 123 3393

Anxiety UK:

[www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

03444 775 774

Specifically for men:

CALM (for men age 15-35yrs)

[www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

0800 58 58 58

Men’s Health Forum

[www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk)

**I**nterests

Try where possible to keep up current interests. Some of these of course will need to change due to current government recommendations on social distancing and self-isolation.

Think about ways your interests could continue or adapt.

For example, if you usually attend a knitting class, why not set up the class online and still get together “virtually”.

**J**ournal

Think about keeping a journal.

Many people find this experience helps their mental health.

This doesn’t have to be a journal about your feelings, you might find it helpful just to record what is going on for you.

Writing each a day a few things you feel grateful for can be a really positive step in maintaining our emotional wellbeing.

A useful tip if you are struggling with anxiety affecting your sleep is to keep a journal by your bed and write down any worries before you try to sleep.

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/journal-to-self-love](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/journal-to-self-love)

**K**indness

Showing kindness to others - such as contacting someone to offer companionship or practical help – has the added benefit of being good for our own emotional wellbeing.

There are some ideas of how to do this on:

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/random-acts-kindness](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/random-acts-kindness)

**L**ocal

Make yourself aware of what is happening locally. There are new groups being set up all the time to help support others, especially those isolating themselves who may need practical and emotional support. Often these groups are found online, for example on Facebook but many people are finding cards dropped through their doors with details of those happy to help.

Although places of worship are not holding mass congregations you can follow services online.

Don’t forget local radio for information about support in your area.

[www.supportstaffordshire.org.uk/covid-19-support/coronavirus-community-support-effort](http://www.supportstaffordshire.org.uk/covid-19-support/coronavirus-community-support-effort)

**M**indfulness and meditation

You might find mindfulness and meditation useful tools to manage your stress, anxiety or low mood symptoms.

To find out more about it check out:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness)

There are mindfulness and meditation apps available that you can pay for but a couple of the well-known ones Calm and Headspace are providing some free programmes during this time.

Calm has an online hub with sleep stories, meditations as well as music and mindful movement. [www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath](http://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath)

Headspace has a programme called “weathering the storm”

[www.headspace.com/covid-19](http://www.headspace.com/covid-19)

**N**ew

It can be difficult occupying ourselves both practically speaking but also mentally whilst spending much more time in our homes.

Why not stimulate your brain by taking the opportunity to try something new?

There are many online resources to try your hand at things such as learning a language, playing an instrument, trying a host of new skills.

There are free online learning courses at [www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com) and [www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn)

You can also look at fun things to do such as online games like crosswords and monopoly.

Of course it doesn’t have to be online either. Books you have been wanting to read on a wide range of fiction and non-fiction subject matter await.

Listening to podcasts can be a great use of time. There is quite an extensive catalogue of podcasts now on a wide range of topics.

**O**lder adults

We are all too aware of the concerns around older adults and their increased vulnerability to the coronavirus. They may also be particularly susceptible to the mental health effects of the outbreak as they are often more isolated, relying on help from others, can be living alone and not all will be accessing online support and information.

There is support for this age group including from Age UK. Their website answers questions often asked including concerns from those in a caring role.

[www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus)

Telephone: 0800 678 1602

**P**ositivity

This is no doubt a challenging time for all of us but maintaining a positive mental attitude where possible is important. One way of doing this is to embrace the idea of “reframing”. This is the idea of looking at our negative thoughts, challenging them and replacing them with more positive thoughts. It forms part of a type of psychotherapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

The following resources may help explore this further:

[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/top-tips-to-improve-your-mental-wellbeing](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/top-tips-to-improve-your-mental-wellbeing)

There is an NHS podcast on this topic under Moodzone: unhelpful thinking

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk) - this provides online CBT therapy resources

**Q**uestions???

Throughout this time, you are likely to find yourself with lots of questions.

Ensure you get the answers from reputable sources and use the resources available to gain some clarity.

Making sure you are fully informed is important and can help alleviate some fears

**R**outine

Maintaining a routine, even if it has to be different from what you are used to, has a positive effect on your mental health.

For example, getting showered and dressed ready for your “working hours” if working from home. Stick to usual mealtimes and make a schedule to incorporate exercise/time in green spaces/relaxation.

Children particularly are sensitive to routine and having one gives them a sense of security. This becomes especially important now so many children are effectively being home-schooled. There are examples online of timetables being made by families to help keep a routine going.

Ultimately keeping healthy routines helps give us a sense of control during uncertain times.

**S**eparating yourself from news coverage.

Whilst it is important to stay informed, overexposure to the news coverage whether on TV, online or in the papers can heighten anxiety.

Be sure to give yourself breaks from the coverage. This may well mean screen-free time and is especially important in the hours before bedtime as this will help aid sleep.

**T**alk.

This may seem obvious but talking really is one of the important things to keep on doing.

Talking about a problem or worry really can help us to manage it better and being listened to by others can make us feel supported and less alone.

Talking about how we feel is not a sign of weakness. It is a way of taking control of our emotional health.

**U**nhealthy habits

At a time of stress it can be easy to fall into unhelpful habits.

Try to keep alcohol intake within recommended levels and avoid smoking and drug taking.

Not only potentially bad for our physical health, drugs and alcohol can affect our mental health in a negative way.

**V**olunteer

If it is safe for you to do so, think about volunteering to help others in your local community.

Find out what is going on - see L for local.

Helping others improves our mental wellbeing and self-esteem.

This might be as simple as dropping a note through the door of any vulnerable people you know to offer help.

**W**alk

As long as you are not self-isolating you can still walk for health and positive emotional wellbeing whilst observing social distancing.

Even better try a walk in a green space (see G for Green spaces). Just be sure to keep at least 2m away from others and not congregate in groups.

**X**-plore. Explore podcasts.

You may already enjoy podcasts but if not why not explore this exciting and fairly new arena.

Podcasts are a series of audio recorded content which you can download to a personal device to listen.

Listening to a podcast can be a great way to practice self-care and reflect on your own mental health.

There are plenty of podcasts on mental health and wellbeing topics but you can choose any topic or find a personality you already like and see if they do podcasts. Topics can range from politics, travel, comedy to food, yoga.

**Y**oung people

We’ve covered children already but young people refers to the older child/teenager.

This group often experience mental health difficulties and are reaching out for support in increasing numbers.

Adolescents are already experiencing physical, emotional and social changes in this period of their life and may be particularly vulnerable to mental health problems.

Good resources include:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/worried-about-your-teenager](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/worried-about-your-teenager)

[www.youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus) - includes a parent support line

[www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk) - mental health support for the under 25s

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

**Zzzzzzz.** Sleep.

Poor sleep can be linked with poor mental health including anxiety and depression.

You might feel that at an anxious time sleep may be even more of an issue for you, but there are lots of practical things you can do to help improve the quality of your sleep.

Find out about “sleep hygiene” and how a regular routine can improve sleep.

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep)

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-sleep-better](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-sleep-better) -there is lots of helpful information here

Why not look out for a podcast on the subject of sleep?

Some mindfulness and meditation apps are designed to be used to aid sleep.