



# Self-Isolation and your Mental Fitness

You might be worried about coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) and how it could affect your life. This may include being asked to stay at home or avoid other people.

This might feel difficult or stressful. But there are lots of things you can try that could help your wellbeing. The following advice has been outlined by MIND, a mental health charity, about how to take care of your mental health and well-being if you are asked to self-isolate. Within this article there are other useful links that may be of use to you. You can find the full article on their website or [via this link](#).

## Connect with People

Keep in touch digitally

- Make plans to video chat with people or groups you'd normally see in person.
- You can also arrange phone calls or send instant messages or texts.
- If you're worried that you might run out of stuff to talk about, make a plan with someone to watch a show or read a book separately so that you can discuss it when you contact each other.
- Think of other ways to keep in contact with people if meeting in person is not possible. For example, you could check your phone numbers are up to date, or that you have current email addresses for friends you've not seen for a while.

Connect with others in similar situations

- If you're part of a group of people who are also self-isolating, you may be part of group communications to receive updates on your situation. This group could also act as an informal support network.
- You could join a peer support community. Mind runs an online peer support community called [Elefriends](#), where you can share your experiences and hear from others.
- If you're going online more than usual or seeking peer support on the internet, it's important to look after your online wellbeing. See our pages about [online mental health](#) for more information.

If you're worried about loneliness

- Think about things you can do to connect with people. For example, putting extra pictures up of the people you care about might be a nice reminder of the people in your life.
- Listen to a chatty radio station or podcast if your home feels too quiet.

## Decide on your Routine

- Plan how you'll spend your time. It might help to write this down on paper and put it on the wall.
- Try to follow your ordinary routine as much as possible. Get up at the same time as normal, follow your usual morning routines, and go to bed at your usual time. Set alarms to remind you of your new schedule if that helps.

- If you aren't happy with your usual routine, this might be a chance to do things differently. For example, you could go to bed earlier, spend more time cooking or do other things you don't usually have time for.
- Think about how you'll spend time by yourself at home. For example, plan activities to do on different days or habits you want to start or keep up.

If you live with other people, it may help to do the following:

- Agree on a household routine. Try to give everyone you live with a say in this agreement.
- Try to respect each other's privacy and give each other space. For example, some people might want to discuss everything they're doing while others won't.

### **Try to Keep Active**

Build physical activity into your daily routine, if possible. Most of us don't have exercise equipment like treadmills where we live, but there are still activities you can do. Exercising at home can be simple and there are options for most ages and abilities, such as:

- cleaning your home
- dancing to music
- going up and down stairs
- [seated exercises](#)
- online exercise workouts that you can follow
- sitting less – if you notice you've been sitting down for an hour, just getting up or changing position can help.

See also the 'Keep Active' suggestions recently shared by CHS.

### **Get as Much Sunlight, Fresh Air and Nature as You Can**

Spending time in green space or bringing nature into your everyday life can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing. It can improve your mood, reduce feelings of stress or anger, and make you feel more relaxed.

It's possible to still get these positive effects from nature while staying indoors at home. You could try the following:

- Spend time with the windows open to let in fresh air.
- Have flowers or potted plants in your home.
- Use natural materials to decorate your living space, or use them in art projects. This could include leaves, flowers, feathers, tree bark or seeds.
- Arrange a comfortable space to sit, for example by a window where you can look out over a view of trees or the sky, or watch birds and other animals.
- Grow plants or flowers on windowsills. For example, you could buy seeds online or look for any community groups that give away or swap them.
- Look at photos of your favourite places in nature. Use them as the background on your mobile phone or computer screen, or print and put them up on your walls.
- Listen to natural sounds, like recordings or apps that play birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall. Get as much natural light as you can. Spend time in your garden if you have one, or open your front or back door and sit on the doorstep.

## Keep Your Mind Stimulated

- **CHS will be sharing ways in which you can access online books to read. Make use of this and transport yourself to another world!**
- Keep your brain occupied and challenged. Set aside time in your routine for this. Read books, magazines and articles. Listen to podcasts, watch films and do puzzles.
- Some libraries have apps you can use to borrow ebooks, audiobooks or magazines from home for free, if you're a library member.
- [FutureLearn](#) and [OpenLearn](#) have free online courses you could try.
- There are lots of apps that can help you learn things, such as a foreign language or other new skills.

## Find Ways to Relax and be Creative

There are lots of different ways that you can relax, take notice of the present moment and use your creative side. These include:

- arts and crafts, such as drawing, painting, collage, sewing, craft kits or upcycling
- DIY
- colouring
- mindfulness
- playing musical instruments, singing or listening to music
- writing
- yoga
- meditation.

See our pages on [relaxation](#) and [mindfulness](#) for more information and ideas.

## Take care with News and Information

- Stay connected with current events, but be careful where you get news and health information from.
- If news stories make you feel anxious or confused, think about switching off or limiting what you look at for a while.
- Social media could help you stay in touch with people, but might also make you feel anxious including if people are sharing news stories or posting about their worries. Consider taking a break or limiting how you use social media. You might decide to view particular groups or pages but not scroll through timelines or newsfeeds.

## If You're Feeling Anxious

- If you have [panic attacks](#) or [flashbacks](#), it might help to plan a 'safe space' in your home that you'll go to.
- You can also find ways to comfort yourself if you're feeling anxious. For example, there are [games and puzzles you can use to distract yourself](#), and [breathing exercises](#) which may help.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) has more information on [how to cope if you're feeling anxious about coronavirus](#).

## If you're feeling Claustrophobic or Trapped

- Open the windows to let in fresh air. Or you could spend time sitting on your doorstep, or in the garden if you have one.
- Try looking at the sky out of the window or from your doorstep. This can help to give you a sense of space.
- Regularly change the rooms you spend time in.

## Hand Washing and Anxiety

Some mental health problems can cause difficult feelings or behaviours to do with washing or hygiene. If you experience this, you might find it hard to hear advice about washing your hands.

If this is making you feel stressed or anxious, here are some things you could try:

- Don't keep re-reading the same advice if this is unhelpful for you.
- Let other people know you're struggling. For example, you could ask them not to remind you to wash your hands.
- Breathing exercises can help you cope and feel more in control. You can [find a simple breathing exercise on the NHS website](#). Our pages on [relaxation](#) also have some exercises you can try, and other relaxation tips.
- Set limits, like washing your hands for the recommended 20 seconds.
- Plan something to do after washing your hands. This could help distract you and change your focus.

## Anxiety UK also suggest practising the 'Apple' technique to deal with anxiety and worries

- **Acknowledge:** Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.
- **Pause:** Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Pause and breathe.
- **Pull back:** Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.
- **Let go:** Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.
- **Explore:** Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention.