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**Establishing and Maintaining a routine during COVID-19 Lockdown**

Being in lockdown is a stressful time. The days all seem to blend together and we can feel we are missing out on so much of our life. We are temporarily missing out on aspects of real life and the people in it. Establishing a daily routine can help us feel more in touch with the reality of our life as it was.

Having a routine can help us feel more in control, at a time where we feel we have no control at all, routine is also very beneficial to our mental health.

When establishing a lockdown routine it is important to include the following aspects of life we would sometimes take for granted:

* Work
* Exercise
* Eating and sleeping
* Social time
* Self care

It is also important to make the weekends feel different and give ourselves things to look forward to.

To establish and maintain a good routine it is essential to start the day well. However tempting it is to sit around in pyjamas all day, getting up at the same time each morning, having a shower, getting dressed and eating breakfast are tasks we would automatically carry out in our normal lives and we should continue to do so.

If we get up at the same time every morning it helps us to sleep better at night by encouraging a strong desire for sleep during our wakeful hours.

During the week we would normally be at work or school so it is important to carry out productive tasks throughout the morning. When you are ready for the day, set yourself a workspace somewhere quiet if you can, and continue with your school work or working from home. This part of the day will give you focus, will keep your brain active and stimulated and give you a sense of achievement when you have completed your tasks.

Throughout the day it is important to give yourself your usual meal breaks at the time you normally have them if you were at school or work. Continue with 3 regular meals a day and, where possible, try to eat as healthily as you can.

It is crucial that you try not to sleep during the day, even if you feel tired, this will negatively impact your sleep at night. Instead of sleeping in the afternoon, try to build fresh air and exercise into your routine at the times you usually feel tired. For example, if you usually feel like napping after lunch this is the perfect time to take advantage of your daily exercise allowance. Going for a walk or a run in the fresh air will wake you up, give you energy and promote positive mental health. When we are lucky enough to have nice weather, the sun on your face has amazing health benefits too. Sun exposure can help reduce mild depression or low mood, lower blood pressure and improve sleep quality. It’s a great excuse to observe nature too, to notice things we wouldn’t normally notice in our gardens or the park. The birds singing, the spring flowers blooming and the colours in our environment!

Daily exercise can help reduce stress and anxiety as well as keeping our hearts healthy. You can find lots of online workouts on You Tube during this period of lockdown.

When we have had a productive working week where we have completed tasks we have set ourselves and taken up regular exercise, its time for the weekend. We all usually look forward to the weekend, and we still can. We need to make the weekend feel different to the rest of the week. So think about how you usually spend the weekend and adapt it. You can try socialising with friends on platforms such as Zoom or House Party, watching a film with your family or re-creating your favourite take away meals.

You can give yourself a break from work at the weekend and focus on self care. Self care is crucial for our positive mental health and wellbeing. Spending time reading or listening to podcasts, practicing meditation and breathing exercises (you tube have plenty), writing down thoughts and feelings, treating ourselves to a nice bath, listening to music are a few things you can try. Self care is about taking care of ourselves so you can find what works for you.

During this period it is essential to remember that this is temporary and that life will return to normal one day. If you are struggling there are people you can talk to.

Make the most of your time, be productive and take care!

**Support agencies available:**

Kooth.com - online counsellors

Samaritans - telephone emotional support:

Mind - mental health advice and guidance

Papyrus - suicide prevention

Mental Health 24/7 Response Line Telephone: **0300 303 1320**