

Staying well when social distancing

1. Establish a daily routine

It can be really difficult to establish/keep a daily routine when we are not working or are unable to do the activities we enjoy such as going to the gym and going shopping. However it is really important to try and maintain our current routine as best as we can.

Tips for how we can do this include:

- Setting an alarm and getting up on a morning as normal, get washed, get dressed, get yourself ready for a productive day.

Don't stay in bed or stay in your pyjamas all day, this will break our routine and reduce our productivity, energy levels and mood.

- Plan your day, give yourself tasks to be completed on each day of the week and set specific time for these tasks and try to stick to it. Spread any household tasks across the week. Try not to do everything in one day.

- Stick to your normal meals times and ensure you have a healthy and balanced diet, this will keep our energy levels and support our immune system. It is also important to drink at least 2 litres water a day.

- Include time in your day for leisure activities, these might not be our normal activities however we need to be creative and find more things to do in the home. Some suggestions include: making a scrapbook, doing a workout in your house, play a board game, do a jigsaw, pamper yourself, watch a movie etc.

2. Balance your weekly routine

In order for us to maintain our health and wellbeing we need to have occupational balance in our life. Occupational balance consists of three types of activities which fall under the following categories:

- Self care:

This category includes anything we need to do to keep our self well. It includes taking care of our physical and mental wellbeing and consists of activities such as exercising, meditating, and eating well. Everything in moderation helps balance.

- Leisure

This involves socializing with friends, family, and new acquaintances. It means participating in activities that bring us joy. This may be difficult to do at this current time however we can still interact with others using the phone and social media. We can set ourselves time to have a movie night, we can still go for a walk as long as we stick within the social distancing guidelines. Other things we can do involve playing video games, doing a workout at home, playing a board game, doing arts and crafts.

Zoo's across the world have set up live streaming for people to view the animals while socially distancing:

- <https://zoo.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams>
- https://www.marwell.org.uk/zoo/keep-in-touch/webcams?rmsrc=1&gclid=EAlalQobChMI3J6Xktm16AIVRfhRCh3wegCKEAAAYASAAEgl-OvD_BwE
- <https://www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/>

If you have access to Instagram and Facebook many musicians are live streaming music for you to listen to in the comfort of your own home.

- Productivity:

This means “doing” things like working at paid jobs, completing school work, studying for exams, volunteering, doing housework, and maintaining our homes. When we do this, we are contributing to something bigger than ourselves and it provides a sense of accomplishment. Others ways we can achieve this is by learning a new skill or completing courses online. The open university offers over 1000 free online courses that people can access and enrol for:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue>

The recovery college are also offering free support and courses:

<https://lms.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk/>

- 3. Think about which regular activities are most important to you.** They don't have to be big things – you might value sitting down with a cuppa or walking your dog. It is important to keep doing these things, even if you have to change the way you do them. For instance, if going to an exercise class is important to you, look for online classes that you can do at home. YouTube has fitness activities for all ages and fitness levels. If you go out to walk your dog, try a quieter route and keep at a social distance from others.
- 4. Set daily goals** to provide purpose and a sense of achievement. This might include things that you mean to do but never get round to. For instance, write a letter to an old friend, sort out a drawer or cupboard, try a new recipe, mend something that has been broken for a long time, play a game with the children.
- 5. Identify the triggers that make you feel low** and look for ways to reduce or manage them. For instance, although it's important to stay informed, if watching the news or social media is making you anxious try these things to feel better:

- Limit how often you access them to once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Only check reliable sources such as the BBC news or World Health Organisation websites.
- Limit how long you spend looking at social media. Set yourself a time limit of 15 minutes to spend looking at social media.
- Allow yourself 'worry' time. Allocate a set amount of 'worry' time during the day – 20 minutes in the morning to worry about things and then try to think about positive things and distract yourself with things you enjoy for the rest of the time.
- Focus on the things you can control rather than the things you can't. For instance, you can control your own social distancing, limiting your social media, turning off the news, finding fun things to do at home.

6. Talk with family, friends and neighbours to help them understand how you feel and how they can help. Talking through feelings can help us feel close to people who care and being listened to can help us feel supported and less alone. For instance, can they talk you through how to use an App on your phone to do an exercise routine or play a game? They might also have ideas about how to keep yourself busy.

7. Take care of yourself. Eating a healthy diet improves mood, gives us more energy and helps us to think clearly. If blood sugar levels drop we might feel tired, irritable and depressed. Eating regular meals prevents blood sugar levels dropping and it's better to have a few smaller meals (including breakfast) than only 2 big meals every day.

- Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables
- Avoid eating too many sugary or salty foods
- Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of water each day
- Avoid drinking too much tea and coffee – caffeine is a stimulant which may give you an initial burst of energy but then may make you feel anxious and depressed.
- More tips about healthy eating can be found on the British Dietetic Association website (www.bda.uk.com).

8. Avoid staying still for too long. Exercise and regular movement will maintain fitness and strength. It can also make you sleep better because you will be more tired at the end of the day. Physical activity releases feel-good hormones in your brain that improve mood and give you more energy.

Activities to try at home:

- Try to sit less. If you spend a long time sitting, get up and move around every hour. If you are working from home, get up and walk about regularly. Take meal breaks away from your desk.
- Do active household chores – hoovering, ironing, DIY
- Try some chair-based exercises – if you have mobility problems or difficulty spending time out of a chair, the NHS website

(<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises/>) has activity routines you can try sitting down.

- Do exercises or stretches at home. The NHS website (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/gym-free-workouts/>) has lots of different routines to try.
- Include more activity in your daily routine – run up the stairs instead of walking, dance around the kitchen when you are cooking.

9. Have a good sleep routine. Sleep is as important to our health as eating, drinking and breathing. It allows our bodies to repair themselves and our brains to make sense of our memories and process information. Here are some things to try if you are struggling with sleep:

- Make sure your bed and bedroom are comfortable – not too cold, not too hot, not too noisy.
- Do some exercise during the day
- Enjoy a relaxing bedtime routine – have a bath
- Avoid looking at screens in the hour before you go to bed
- Avoid caffeine – stop drinking tea and coffee by mid afternoon
- If something is troubling you and there is nothing you can do about it right away, write it down before going to bed and tell yourself you will deal with it tomorrow

10. Keep in touch. Social distancing can cause people to feel lonely and isolated, particularly if they are used to seeing others regularly.

- Arrange to speak to someone most days on the phone, through social media or over the garden fence.
- Try phoning a befriending service - Age UK and Silverline have people for older people to speak to.
- Elefriends is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They are available 24/7, most are free and you can access them wherever you are.