

Looking after your Mental Health during COVID-19 and other Pandemic restrictions

The impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, physical distancing and isolation can make us feel anxious, stressed and worried. Read about what you can do to look after your mental wellbeing and look out for those around you as we tackle these challenges together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly changed the way we live. To help keep us safe, it is likely that our lives will be different for a while.

When we aren't able to see our friends and family regularly, it can be harder to keep on top of how we're feeling.

Being aware of how you're feeling and knowing what you can do to look after your mental wellbeing is an important part of staying healthy during this challenging time.

Grounding Technique

Feeling stressed and overwhelmed? Try grounding yourself by following these steps:

- NOTICE how you are feeling and what you are thinking
- SLOW DOWN and CONNECT with your body by taking slow and deep breaths
- REFOCUS on your surroundings by engaging your different senses – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch

YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=19&v=DIT3XwAto64&feature=emb_logo



Depression and Anxiety

What's the link?

Depression and anxiety can occur at the same time. An estimated 45 percent of people with one mental health condition also meet the criteria for two or more disorders. A particular study found that people with either anxiety or depression have the other condition. Although each condition has its own causes, they may share similar symptoms and treatments.

What are the symptoms of each?

Some symptoms of depression and anxiety overlap, such as problems with sleep, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. But there are several key differences that help distinguish between the two.

Depression

Feeling down, sad, or upset is normal. It can be concerning feeling that way for several days or weeks on end.

Physical symptoms and behavioural changes caused by depression include:

- decreased energy, chronic fatigue, or feeling sluggish frequently
- difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or recalling
- pain, aches, cramps, or gastrointestinal problems without any clear cause
- changes in appetite or weight
- difficulty sleeping, waking early, or oversleeping

Emotional symptoms of depression include:

- loss of interest or no longer finding pleasure in activities or hobbies
- persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, or emptiness
- feeling hopeless or pessimistic
- anger, irritability, or restlessness
- feeling guilty or experiencing feelings of worthlessness or helplessness
- thoughts of death or suicide
- suicide attempts

Anxiety

Anxiety, or fear and worry, can happen to anyone from time to time, too. It's not unusual to experience anxiety before a big event or important decision.

But, chronic anxiety can be debilitating and lead to irrational thoughts and fears that interfere with your daily life.

Physical symptoms and behavioural changes caused by generalized anxiety disorder include:

- feeling fatigued easily
- difficulty concentrating or recalling
- muscle tension
- racing heart
- grinding teeth
- sleep difficulties, including problems falling asleep and restless, unsatisfying sleep

Emotional symptoms of anxiety include:

- restlessness, irritability, or feeling on edge
- difficulty controlling worry or fear
- dread
- panic

Suicide prevention

If you believe someone you know is in **immediate** danger of taking their own life:

- do not leave them alone—if possible, ask for help from friends or family members
- ask them to give you any weapons they have, and remove sharp objects or anything else they could use to hurt themselves
- try to keep them as calm as possible
- call **Triple Zero (000)** or take them to an emergency room.

Warning signs of suicidal thoughts:

- looking for ways to hurt or kill oneself
- talking and writing about suicide or death
- feelings of hopelessness
- expressing rage, anger or revenge
- engaging in reckless or risky behaviours
- previous suicide attempts or self-harming
- increased use of drugs and alcohol
- withdrawing from friends and families
- quitting activities that were previously important
- putting affairs in order, e.g. giving away possessions, especially those that have special significance for the person
- anxiety or agitation
- abnormal sleep patterns
- dramatic changes in mood, such as sudden feelings of happiness after a long period of sadness, or depression
- writing a suicide note or goodbye letters to people.

What should I do if I think someone is suicidal?

People who receive support from friends and family, and have access to mental health services, are less likely to act on their suicidal impulses than those who are socially isolated. If someone you know is exhibiting warning signs:

- ask if they are depressed or thinking about suicide
- check if they are seeing a therapist or taking medication
- assure them they are not alone and there is hope of things getting better
- tell them that you care and encourage them to seek professional help.

If you or someone you know needs help now, call **Lifeline** on **13 11 14**. If someone is in **immediate** danger, call **Triple Zero (000)**.

Self Care

It has been a challenging and unsettling time for our community during the worldwide outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Everyone is affected, and the changes to our way of life can take a heavy toll on our mental health, especially for those already living with a mental health condition.

It is more important than ever to take steps to safeguard our own mental health, putting us in the best possible position to help others within the workforce who might need support at this time.

ABC's for Everyone



A. Wellbeing self check-in



B. Connect with a buddy






C. Check-in with formal support

In times of uncertainty it's normal to feel some anxiety about the world around us. It's important that we have a level of self-awareness about our response to these circumstances and how this may present in the way we behave. This wellbeing check-in is a guide for you to identify your current responses and behaviours and how they could be affecting your mental health and wellbeing. Importantly, it will help you work out which areas you may need to focus on to look after yourself, and ideas for how to stay well, regain balance or seek support.




This wellbeing checklist can help you understand how you are feeling through your own observable behaviours.

Which category do you think you are currently sitting in?

|  <p>STAY WELL</p> |  <p>REGAIN BALANCE</p> |  <p>SEEK SUPPORT</p> |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Moods and Emotions</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Normal mood and emotion fluctuations <input type="checkbox"/> Normal levels of anxiety | <p>Moods and Emotions</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Slight difficulty managing mood and emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Increased levels of anxiety | <p>Moods and Emotions</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to manage mood or emotions <input type="checkbox"/> High levels of anxiety |
| <p>Attitude and Outlook</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Positive outlook and attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Focused on the present moment | <p>Attitude and Outlook</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly negative outlook or attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Predominantly future-focused | <p>Attitude and Outlook</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Bleak outlook or attitude <input type="checkbox"/> Worrying about the future |
| <p>Physical Health</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Eating Well <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping Well <input type="checkbox"/> Exercising regularly <input type="checkbox"/> None/ Appropriate consumption of alcohol or tobacco | <p>Physical Health</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Slight disturbance to diet <input type="checkbox"/> Slight disturbance to sleep routine <input type="checkbox"/> Exercising less often than usual <input type="checkbox"/> Increased consumption of alcohol/ tobacco or other substances | <p>Physical Health</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor diet <input type="checkbox"/> Poor sleep routine <input type="checkbox"/> Substantially less exercise and activity than usual <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive consumption of alcohol/ tobacco or other substances |
| <p>Social Networks</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Staying connected to family, friends and colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged in interactions with social network | <p>Social Networks</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Social withdrawal from family, friends and colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> Not initiating contact with social network <input type="checkbox"/> Mild sense of loneliness and isolation | <p>Social Networks</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Disconnected from family, friends and colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> Strong sense of loneliness and isolation |
| <p>Workplace Presentation</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Performing well <input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining a structured routine <input type="checkbox"/> Positive workplace behaviour | <p>Workplace Presentation</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Decreased performance or productivity | <p>Workplace Presentation</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Extreme difficulty performing role <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to function productively <input type="checkbox"/> Negative workplace behaviour |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Missed deadlines or decreased work quality <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease in positive workplace behaviour | |
| COVID-19 Factors <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly increased anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Coping with work situation <input type="checkbox"/> Structured home routine <input type="checkbox"/> Coping with family care requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Low levels of medical anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Connecting with family and friends through technology <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy level of news consumption | COVID-19 Factors <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate levels of anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertain about work situation <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured home routine <input type="checkbox"/> Challenges with family care requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate levels of medical anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Struggling to connect with family and friends through technology <input type="checkbox"/> Unhelpful level of news consumption | COVID-19 Factors <input type="checkbox"/> Extreme levels of anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertain about work situation or out of work <input type="checkbox"/> No home routine <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to cope with family care requirements <input type="checkbox"/> High levels of medical anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> No connection with family and friends through technology <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive and unhelpful levels of news consumption |

Depending where you placed yourself in the wellbeing self check-in, there are a range of strategies you could try to support your mental health and wellbeing:



|  STAY WELL |  REGAIN BALANCE |  SEEK SUPPORT |
|---|--|--|
| Focus on staying well by maintaining a positive routine and proactively prioritising your mental health. | Focus on getting the balance right by increasing the protective factors around you and prioritising access to available supports. | Focus on taking active steps towards accessing appropriate supports. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look after yourself using the 5 ways to wellbeing to create a routine that prioritises your own self-care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the 5 ways to wellbeing to determine which areas you may have lost focus of and prioritise these areas Stay connected with your own support network and make yourself familiar with the external support available to you | <p>Take steps to access formal or expert support. This may be through your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct site manager SQC HR Manager (Susan Hensley) SQC Compliance Manager (Ashley Bakay) Workplace Employee Assistance Program (EAP) A referral from your GP to see a psychologist Accessing a mental health support service or COVID-19 specific support |




Support Contact Numbers

- **Covid-19 Health Advice and Information:** 13 43 25 84
- **Headspace:** 1800 650 890
- **Lifeline:** 131 114
- **Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service:** 1800 512 348
- **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National):** 131 450
- **Kids Helpline contact:** 1800 551 800
- **SANE Australia:** 1800 187 263

5 Ways to Wellbeing

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing can help you look after your mental and physical health, create routines that prioritise self-care, and discover new ways to support your own wellbeing every day.

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|  | <p>Connecting with others is important for our wellbeing and helps us feel safe, less stressed and anxious</p> | <p>While working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call or video conference with colleagues instead of emailing or messaging • Inject some fun into your day with 'getting to know you' competitions within your team • Plan virtual morning tea or coffee catch ups • Organise a virtual team lunch <p>Outside of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write emails and letters to share a favourite memory • Play online video games or board games with friends or family • Start or join a virtual book club • Engage in a group chat with friends, family or workmates • Video chat with someone you care about • Host a virtual dinner or drinks catch up • Check on neighbours and people in your community and provide support where you can |
|  | <p>Staying curious and engaged with the world around you is a great way to maintain health and wellbeing</p> | <p>While working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set aside time each day to learn a new aspect of your regular daily tech to build your efficiency • Share knowledge across your team with a team lunch and learn • Spend 10 minutes a day reading from a Journal or connecting with an expert in your field • Learn a new skill via online tutorials • Stretch yourself with a new project or participate in a collaborative project and learn new skills <p>Outside of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take an online course in a topic you've always been interested in • Learn a musical instrument using a YouTube tutorial • Begin learning a new language • Take an online cooking course • Set yourself a reading challenge • Subscribe to a new podcast • Call your parents or grandparents and ask about life when they were growing up • Research a different culture |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
|  | <p>Being aware of what is going on around you can help to focus on the present moment</p> | <p>While working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try breathing exercises • Concentrate on one thing at a time • Step away from the screen and take regular breaks • Eat lunch outside <p>Outside of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice the beauty of the neighbourhood you live in • Take time to feel the sun on your skin and appreciate fresh air when you can • Reflect each day on things you are grateful for • Take the time to thank someone for how they make you feel • Download a meditation app and practice mindfulness regularly • Pay attention to the plants in your home or garden and how they change daily |
|  | <p>Staying physically active is important for overall health and wellbeing and helps clear the mind</p> | <p>While working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand for short meetings • Take a walk around the block – between meetings or during your lunch break • Organise a step challenge with your colleagues • Take a walking meeting over the phone • Walk around the block at the end of your day to simulate the commute home <p>Outside of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go for a walk around your neighbourhood • Download a running or walking app and set yourself a challenge to complete a certain distance • Sign up to an online yoga, pilates or stretching class • Try a new kind of exercise online • Use household items as weights and try a strength workout online • Dust the cobwebs off the bike and go for a ride |
|  | <p>Giving back and showing kindness to others has a two-fold effect, making both people involved feel good</p> | <p>While working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a habit of thanking all of your team mates for their help throughout the day • Send a thank you note, or text or tweet someone who contributed something positive to your day • Encourage your team mates to recognise others • Listening makes others feel valued and appreciated. Give the people you're talking to today your full, focused attention <p>Outside of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give compliments to those that make you feel good • Think about a skill you could share virtually with a friend, family member, neighbour or colleague • Share a favourite recipe <p>Where government restrictions allow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer help to a neighbour who can't do their shopping • Walk a friend's dog if they are unable • Run errands for those more vulnerable • Cook an extra meal for a vulnerable friend |

Healthy Breaks

Most people are given some break time in their regular workday to help them unwind and refocus. What you do during that break time could have an impact on your mental health at work.

The following activities are no or low-cost and are designed to encourage you and your colleagues to take regular breaks even during the busiest workdays. Try some of these calming, energising and relaxing ideas to find your favourites.

| CALMING | ENERGISING | RELAXING |
|---|---|---|
| Take time to tidy up. Clear the stress away | Tackle the stairs | Do some yoga, by yourself or with some friends |
| Work on a puzzle | Go and deliver your messages in person instead of emailing | Take a nature walk. If you're in the CBD, look for your closest park or green space |
| Create a gratitude wall with post-it notes | Stretch at your desk. You can find plenty of free simple stretching guides online | Set up a game space in your office and enjoy some fun |
| Get inspired by collecting and sharing inspirational thoughts | Take a ball and a work mate and go for a kick or catch | Take a 15-minute creativity break. Sketching and colouring can be really soothing |
| Find somewhere quiet and meditate | Form a healthy snack club | Check out some online comics or cartoons for a laugh |
| Post positive messages on a shared whiteboard | Try and beat your personal best water intake or daily steps measures | Do some breathing exercises |
| Imagine your ideal holiday and do some Internet research | Compliment a colleague | Have a soothing break with a bit of play dough squishing and creating |
| Treat yourself to a healthy meal or snack | Go for a Purple Walk (or Blue or Yellow!). Take 10 minutes to walk around the office or neighbourhood and count all the purple things you spot. | Take a buddy and go for a walk or a cuppa |
| Call a friend | | Watch something funny on YouTube. |
| Have a mini spa session by mindfully applying hand lotion. | | |

Exercises for Stress Reduction and Deep Relaxation

Incorporating relaxation into your life can help you reduce the stress levels in the body and improve both your physical and mental health. With 10 minutes and a quiet place, even the busiest day can feel a bit more manageable and calm.

TAKE A VIRTUAL HOLIDAY

How to take this break:

1. Find a private calm space and make yourself comfortable.
2. Take a few slow, deep breaths, watching your belly rise and fall to ground yourself in the moment.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Imagine yourself in a beautiful location where everything is lovely. You might think of a beach, a mountain, a forest, or a being in a favourite room curled up on your favourite chair.
5. Imagine yourself becoming calm and relaxed, smiling, feeling happy and having a good time.
6. Focus on the different sensory attributes present in your scene to make it more vivid in your mind. What can you see? Smell? Hear? Feel? For instance, if you are imagining the beach, spend some time vividly imagining the warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of the ocean, seaweed and salt spray, and the sound of the waves, wind and seagulls. The more you can invoke your senses, the more vivid the entire image will become.
7. Remain within your scene, touring its various sensory aspects for five to ten minutes or until you feel relaxed.
8. Assure yourself that you can return to this place whenever you want or need to relax.
9. Open your eyes again and then re-join your world.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

How to take this break:

Find a quiet space, sit in a chair with feet on the floor, palms on your lap, sitting tall. Close your eyes or soften your gaze and notice how you feel.

Focus on your breath, the expansion of your belly as it expands on the inhale and contracts as you exhale. Breathe normally and notice how you feel compared to when you started. When you are ready, take a minute to breathe deeply before re-joining the world.

GRAB YOUR EARBUDS

You can access a range of video resources for stress reduction, deep relaxation and mindfulness from the University Health Network, Canada: <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/employee-resources/exercises-for-stress-reduction-amp-deep-relaxation>

You can also find some great local resources at www.smilingmind.com.au

Create your own Self-Care Plan

Grab a cuppa, a pen and 20 minutes to create your own self-care plan. Think about what you've tried in the past and what's worked well (or not). If you're stuck for ideas, who in your life inspires you? What are they doing to take care of themselves?

Capture some ideas, give it a go, and revisit in a few months to check in with yourself. Remember to capture what you're going to do and when you're going to do it.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Physical</i></p> | <p><i>Psychological</i></p> |
| <p><i>Ideas:</i> sleep, diet, exercise, making time to see a doctor, attending to your personal care (i.e. hair cut).</p> <p><i>My plan:</i></p> | <p><i>Ideas:</i> mindfulness or meditation, setting healthy boundaries, going to a counsellor, or your GP, journaling.</p> <p><i>My plan:</i></p> |
| <p><i>Work</i></p> | <p><i>Emotional</i></p> |
| <p><i>Ideas:</i> trying some of the calming, energising or relaxing healthy break suggestions, objectively looking at your role and what's working for you (or not).</p> <p><i>My plan:</i></p> | <p><i>Ideas:</i> saying yes to your needs (and no to others) more often, cultivating emotional intelligence, learning what your triggers are, practicing self-compassion.</p> <p><i>My plan:</i></p> |
| <p><i>Personal</i></p> | <p><i>Spiritual / Energy</i></p> |
| <p><i>Ideas:</i> catching up with a friend, making a vision board, learning an instrument or taking a class in something new, reading, journaling, hanging out with family.</p> <p><i>My plan:</i></p> | <p><i>Ideas:</i> making time for what nurtures your soul, connecting to your inner self through reflection and time alone, creating new rituals for any faith, spiritual or energising practices you enjoy.</p> <p><i>My plan:</i></p> |

Additional Resources:

- <https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/resource/support-for-yourself/warning-signs-of-mental-ill-health>
- <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/>
- <https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/resource/support-for-yourself/social-connection>

References:

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- <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/ongoing-support-during-coronavirus-covid-19/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19-restrictions>
- <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/mental-health/suicide>
- <https://www.superfriend.com.au/covid-19-support/wellbeing-self-check-in/>
- https://www.superfriend.com.au/app/uploads/2018/12/SPF0193_LookingAfterYourselfBooklet_A5_WEB_vF.pdf