



## Looking after our mental health

As countries introduce measures to restrict movement as part of efforts to reduce the number of people infected with COVID-19, more and more of us are making huge changes to our daily routines.

The new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues take time to get used to. Adapting to lifestyle changes such as these, and managing the fear of contracting the virus and worry about people close to us who are particularly vulnerable, are challenging for all of us. They can be particularly difficult for people with mental health conditions.

Fortunately, there are lots of things that we can do to look after our own mental health and to help others who may need some extra support and care.

Here are tips and advice that we hope you will find useful.

- **Keep informed.** Listen to advice and recommendations from your national and local authorities. Follow trusted news channels, such as local and national TV and radio, and keep up-to-date with the latest news from @WHO on social media.
- **Have a routine.** Keep up with daily routines as far as possible, or make new ones.
  - Get up and go to bed at similar times every day.
  - Keep up with personal hygiene.
  - Eat healthy meals at regular times.
  - Exercise regularly.
  - Allocate time for working and time for resting.
  - Make time for doing things you enjoy.
- **Minimize newsfeeds.** Try to reduce how much you watch, read or listen to news that makes you feel anxious or distressed. Seek the latest information at specific times of the day, once or twice a day if needed.
- **Social contact is important.** If your movements are restricted, keep in regular contact with people close to you by telephone and online channels.
- **Alcohol and drug use.** Limit the amount of alcohol you drink or don't drink alcohol at all. Don't start drinking alcohol if you have not drunk alcohol before. Avoid using alcohol and drugs as a way of dealing with fear, anxiety, boredom and social isolation.

There is no evidence of any protective effect of drinking alcohol for viral or other infections. In fact, the opposite is true as the harmful use of alcohol is associated with increased risk of infections and worse treatment outcomes.

And be aware that alcohol and drug use may prevent you from taking sufficient precautions to protect yourself against infection, such as compliance with hand hygiene.

- **Screen time.** Be aware of how much time you spend in front of a screen every day. Make sure that you take regular breaks from on-screen activities.
- **Video games.** While video games can be a way to relax, it can be tempting to spend much more time on them than usual when at home for long periods. Be sure to keep the right balance with off-line activities in your daily routine.

- **Social media.** Use your social media accounts to promote positive and hopeful stories. Correct misinformation wherever you see it.
- **Help others.** If you are able to, offer support to people in your community who may need it, such as helping them with food shopping.
- **Support health workers.** Take opportunities online or through your community to thank your country's health-care workers and all those working to respond to COVID-19.

### Don't discriminate

Fear is a normal reaction in situations of uncertainty. But sometimes fear is expressed in ways which are hurtful to other people. Remember:

- Be kind. Don't discriminate against people because of your fears of the spread of COVID-19.
- Don't discriminate against people who you think may have coronavirus.
- Don't discriminate against health workers. Health workers deserve our respect and gratitude.
- COVID-19 has affected people from many countries. Don't attribute it to any specific group.

### If you are a parent

In times of stress, it is common for children to seek more of your attention.

What you can do:

- Maintain familiar routines as much as possible, or create new ones, especially if you must stay at home.
- Discuss the new coronavirus with your children in an honest way, using age-appropriate language.
- Support your children with at-home learning and make sure time is set aside for play.
- Help children find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing or drawing, can help you with this process.
- Help children stay in contact with friends and family members through telephone and online channels.
- Make sure that your children have time away from screens every day and spend time doing off-line activities together. Do something creative: draw a picture, write a poem, build something. Bake a cake. Sing or dance, or play in your garden, if you have one.
- Try and ensure that your children do not spend significantly more time than usual on video games.

### If you are an older adult

- Keep in regular contact with loved ones, for example by telephone, e-mail, social media or video conference.
- Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible for eating, sleeping, and activities you enjoy.
- Learn simple daily physical exercises to do at home when in quarantine so you can maintain mobility.
- Find out how to get practical help if needed, like calling a taxi, having food delivered or asking for medical care. Make sure you have a one-month supply or longer of your regular medicines. Ask family members, friends or neighbors for support, if needed.

### If you have a mental health condition

- If you are being treated for a mental health condition, make sure that you continue to take medication as prescribed, and that you have a way of re-stocking your medication. If you see a mental health specialist, find out how to continue with that support during the outbreak.
- Keep in touch with people who care for you and know who you can contact for support if your mental health declines.
- If you are being treated for an alcohol or drug use disorder, be aware that the COVID-19 outbreak may lead to increased feelings of fear, anxiety and isolation that can increase the risk of relapse, substance use, disengagement from treatment or non-compliance with treatment regimens. Make sure that you continue to take medication as prescribed, particularly if you receive treatment with opioid medicines such as methadone or buprenorphine, and that you have a way of obtaining a regular supply of your medication. If you are receiving support through a psychologist or support group, find out how to continue that support during the outbreak.
- If you are being treated for gaming or gambling disorder, continue with your treatment if possible. Check with your therapist or health-care provider about the best way of continuing with therapy during confinement at home.