**Coronavirus: 8 ways to look after your mental health**

**As news about coronavirus (COVID-19) dominate the headlines and public concern is on the rise, Mental Health Europe would like to remind that taking care of your mental health is as important as looking after your physical health. Good mental health and positive wellbeing can help you better cope with the COVID-19 threat and the uncertainty it’s creating.**

There are many ways to keep a sense of control in order to ease coronavirus anxiety:

**1. Seek accurate information from legitimate sources**

Limit yourself to reading information only from official sources like the[**World Health Organisation (WHO)**](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019), the [**European Commission**](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en) or **reliable national sources** (for example, [Belgian government website](https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/)). These credible sources of information are key to avoid the fear and panic that misinformation may cause.

 [Watch WHO’s Q&A on mental health during COVID-19 >>](https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1237372330696798208?s=20)

**2. Set limits around news on COVID-19**

Try to **avoid excessive exposure** to media coverage. Constant monitoring of news updates and social media feeds about COVID-19 can intensify feelings of worry and distress. Consider turning off automatic notifications and taking a break from the news. Setting boundaries to how much news you read, watch or listen will allow you to focus on your life and actions over which you have control, as opposed to wondering ‘what if?’. WHO advises seeking**factual information** mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones.

 [Read WHO’s Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak >>](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf)

**3. Look after yourself**

Self-care in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak includes **focusing on things you can control** (like having good hygiene) instead of those you cannot (stopping the virus). Where possible, **maintain your daily routine** and normal activities: eating healthy meals, getting enough sleep and doing things that you enjoy. Consider creating a daily routine that **prioritise your wellbeing and positive mental health**. Activities, like taking a walk, meditating or exercising, can help you to relax and will have a positive impact on your thoughts and feelings. The [Mental Health Foundation](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/), for example, recommends that you see it as an opportunity that might have benefits like finally catching up on sleep.

It is particularly important for **health care workers** to take care of their basic needs and ensure good rest between shifts due to overtime hours or work overload in the time of crisis.

 [Read Mental Health Foundation’s advice for staying mentally healthy during the COVID-19 outbreak >>](https://mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak)

**4. Reach out to others and support people around you**

**Keeping in touch** with your friends and family may ease the stress caused by COVID-19. Talking through your concerns and feelings may help you find ways of dealing with challenges. Receiving support and care from others can bring a sense of comfort and stability. **Assisting other people** in their time of need and reaching out to someone who may be feeling alone or concerned can benefit both the person receiving support as well as the helper.

Many people may also wonder what to do if they are put under quarantine. Although the idea of self-isolation may seem daunting, keep in mind that this is only temporary and that there are still **many ways to regularly connect** with others digitally.

 [Read ECDC’s considerations relating to social distancing measures in response to the COVID-19 epidemic >>](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/considerations-relating-social-distancing-measures-response-covid-19-epidemic)

**5. Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking**

Try and focus on **things that are positive** in your life. WHO recommends to find opportunities to amplify the voices, positive stories and positive images of local people who have experienced the novel coronavirus and have **recovered** or who have **supported** a loved one through recovery and are willing to share their experience.

 [When it comes to mental health, words matter. Read our tips on how to be mindful when talking about mental health >>](https://www.mhe-sme.org/infographicwordsmatter/)

**6. Acknowledge your feelings**

It is normal to feel overwhelmed, stressed, anxious or upset, among a wide range of other emotional reactions, in the current situation. Allow yourself time to **notice and express** **what you’re feeling**. This could be by writing them down in a journal, talking to others, doing something creative, or practising meditation.

 [Find more tips on how to relax and stay creative >>](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse2066b)

**7. Take time to talk with your children about the COVID-19 outbreak**

It is equally important to help children cope with stress and protect them from any coronavirus hysteria. **Answer** their questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that children can understand. **Respond** to your child’s reactions in a supportive way, **listen** to their concerns and give them extra care, attention and support. **Reassure** your children that they are safe. **Let them know** it is OK if they feel upset. **Share** with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope with you.

[Read WHO’s recommendations on how to help children cope with stress during COVID-19 >> >>](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf)

**8. Ask for professional support**

Follow protection and prevention recommendations provided by qualified health professionals. If all of this does not help, consider reaching out for support by a **professional counsellor** or **peers**. **Peer support** is usually organised on a local or national basis so it is best to start your search with those in your local area so that you can actually talk with someone who knows what is available. Using terms such as *‘peer support for mental ill health’* or *‘mental health service user organisations’* and your locality into your internet search engine may well be helpful.

[There are also support options online or via telephone for young people >>](https://www.mhe-sme.org/library/youth-helplines/)

There is a wide range of measures to tackle coronavirus anxiety and protect your mental health and that of your loved ones. Keep in mind that this pandemic will pass and that there is always help available. Taking proactive measures can help manage your mental health during these times of uncertainty.