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Self-Care during Social Distancing: Back to Basics

We are being asked to self-isolate and engage in social distancing, which for a lot of people means staying in more and working from home. Below are some key things to put in place from the start of your time spent at home in order to make sure you're looking after your mental health as well as physical health.

1. Social distancing is not social isolation!

Pick up your phone, install a videoconferencing app, make a card or e-card for friends who are having a tough time. Organise an online board games night or karaoke session, attend an online dance party or exercise class (it's all out there on the internet!), or just have a web-call coffee (or beer) with a few friends.

2. Don't miss out on daylight

When you're working from home it's easy to let your hours slip a bit, but be careful not to miss out on daylight! Sunlight is really important for keeping our circadian rhythm on track, which affects both our sleep (crucial to maintaining good immune function) and our mood. Make sure you're up and have your curtains open for at least 9 hours a day. The more direct sunlight you can get the better, so try working from next to a window, or go for a walk.



3. Be outside as much as possible

Currently we are still allowed to go outside- make the most of it! If you are walking, running or on your bike it is unlikely you will get within 2m of other people for long enough for them to cough on you, you won't have to touch any surfaces or door handles that other people have touched, and you'll be improving your lung function while you're at it! Plus there's no end to the mental health benefits of getting outside and getting active!



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4. Prioritise food

Sometimes when we are very anxious (particularly about contamination) we can lose our appetite. Also lots of people are worried about running out of food, or about their financial situation, so might be tempted to ration food. However if we stop fuelling our bodies properly our immune systems won't be as effective if we do catch the virus. Make sure you keep eating 3 square meals a day, but do cook at home where possible.

5. Don't make every day a pyjama day

While it might be tempting to live in your pyjamas for a couple of weeks, don't! Try to stick to showering as often as you normally would, and make getting washed and dressed one of the first things you do with your morning. You might not wear the same clothes you'd have worn to work, but changing into 'day clothes' can help us shift mindset ready for a productive day, and then when you get back into pyjamas at the end of the day that's a signal to your mind and body to wind down again.

6. Set goals

Know what you want to achieve with your time at home- how about all those odd DIY jobs you've been meaning to do, clothes that need sewing up, or folders that need going through? What's a cause you really care about and how can you contribute online? Is there something you're really interested in and would love to learn more about? See the resource on *setting values based goals from self-isolation*, soon to be published on this page.

7. Structure is still important

Usually a day working from home is a luxury because we can lie in late, work late, watch TV over lunch... BUT when you're working from home every day and not used to it, it's important to try to maintain your work/life boundaries. Pick an area of your home or room to be your 'office'- or set up an office at your kitchen table and then pack it all away at the end of the working day. Try to keep whatever hours you are used to (9-5 for most of us). It can be helpful to schedule in phone meetings for key times you might be likely to find yourself procrastinating, for example first thing in the morning and after the 'lunch break'. You might also need to schedule a social call for the end of the day so you're not tempted to



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work later. If this is impractical, try asking a colleague or friend to check in with you at times during the day to keep you accountable. It may also help to use an *activity scheduling* sheet, to be uploaded on this page shortly.

8. Limit news time

Pick one or two sources that you trust to give non-biased reports of what is going on and check them once a day. You won't fall behind with the news if you do, and if you're regularly in touch with other people you'll hear more information through them anyway. More time than this spent reading articles and headlines will just fuel worry. Perhaps consider incorporating reading the news into your 'worry time', a technique for worrying that's explained further in another resource soon to be uploaded on this page.

9. Look for the positives, and remind each other of them

While this situation is really difficult it doesn't change the fact that spring is happening all around us, the days are getting longer and the sun is starting to feel warm at times. There are flowers out and birds singing. The roads are quieter now, and the air is cleaner for the reduced pollution. People are being more active, and drinking less now a walk in the park is safer than a drink in the pub. People are pulling together to deal with the problem, creating and offering their services, donating to those most in need, and paying more attention to one another's physical and mental wellbeing than we ever normally would. These things don't outweigh the difficult things, or make them go away, but they are there and that is important to remember!

