

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

To get us through what seems like a very surreal and crazy time, here are some helpful tips that I use myself and with clients. It may help to print and put it up somewhere in the house you know you'll walk by so you can remind yourself when things feel rough or just add as a part of your daily routine at home.

ALLOW FEELINGS



This is not a normal time, but what we are feeling is.

It is also important to tell ourselves that this isolation period will end at some point.

Remember you are not alone, we are going to feel levels of shock, anxiety, worry, fear - all normal feelings when something is uncertain, unknown and feels out of our control. Give yourself permission to a) acknowledge what you feel b) understand you are amongst others who feel similar to you c) tell yourself feelings ebb and flow, it feels intense now but won't last forever.

Notice how your feelings change in the day, hours, minutes.

FOOD

As with most areas in life, we have to work holistically, and our gut plays a huge part in the responses to our brain and anxiety. Try to eat anti-inflammatory and fresh foods if you can such as; garlic, ginger, turmeric, onions, plain yogurt, fermented foods such as sauerkraut in your daily food.



Our immune system suffers when we are in a state of anxiety so add citrus fruits, berries, broccoli, mushrooms, kale and colourful veg as an immune system booster.

CONNECT

As humans we need social contact, so talk to the people at home, use video messaging, telephone calls with friends, families, groups you are associated with. It is important to air what we feel, to see and hear people we are close to.

Singing with others has also been found to reduce tension and calm our bodies.

If you can't speak to anyone, go to <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/where-someone-will-listen-and-you-can-air-what-you-are-feeling>. Call free on 116 123



SOCIAL MEDIA SAVVY

There is information, opinions, updates 24 hours a day, a lot of it can be fear generating and not helpful for our mental health. Notice what happens when you have read a negative feed on social media, what happens to your heart rate, your thoughts, your levels of anxiety.

Often one thought then leads to a chain of worry.

Only go to trusted sources for information such as [nhs.gov.uk](https://www.nhs.gov.uk) and limit your news to once a day.



During isolation, social media can be a vital life line in seeing friends, family, work colleagues and connecting with the outside world safely. If however, it increases anxiety, use [grounding_\(p3\)](#) to reset your body and mind and come back to the present moment.

GROUNDING

If we can get in touch with our body and senses, the mental chatter will ease or stop. For that moment, our body knows that it is safe and calms our nervous system from an anxious state.

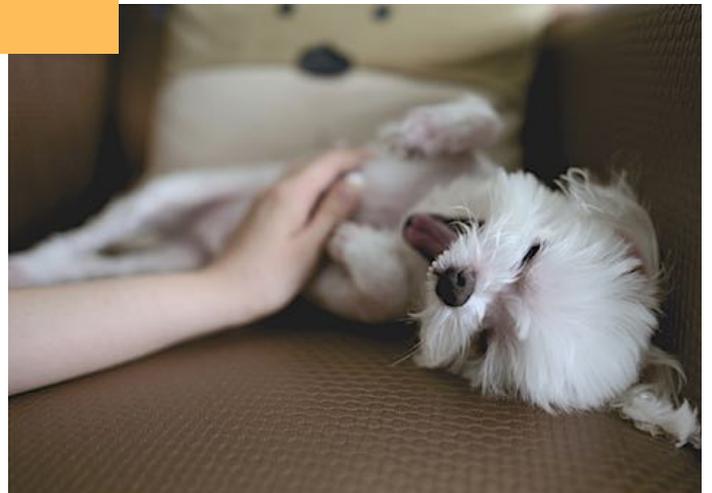
Try these grounding techniques as soon as you notice your head clogging with thoughts and your stomach is in knots. Even better have this as a daily part of your day.



FEEL

*Kick your socks off and **feel** the ground beneath you, the tiles, carpet, path in the garden, whatever your standing on, feel it. When you're drinking a drink, feel the glass in your hands. Heighten the sense of touch and acknowledge what it is like; hot, cold, warm, sweet, sour?*

If you have a pet you can stroke, notice as you stroke them this can lower our heart rate and have a calming effect.



SMELL

***Smell** the washing when it comes out of the machine, smell the air when you open the window, if you have access to essential oils then open the bottle and smell the aroma. Smell has a powerful way of connecting us to different feelings.*

Have you got a favourite scent that reminds you of a positive time? Where does it take you?



HEAR

Listen to the birds, the breeze or your favourite songs. There are some great calming playlists you can find on Spotify for example. Notice what you can hear around you.

If you are struggling to read or concentrate on anything, maybe an audiobook or BBC Sounds has free stories/dramas.



TASTE

*It is really easy to chew and guzzle our food or drink down. So really **taste** what you're eating or drinking.*

Take the time to notice it and savour it. Even if you only manage it for one drink of the day or one mouthful of a meal.



LOOK

*Whether it's a rainy day or a sunny one, **look** and notice the sky, the trees, the birds, take note of the things that are still the same. Make a list of them, as it is easy to focus solely on what has changed at this time. If we take time to look and notice, much is the same.*



Senses bring us back to the here and now. This allows us to be in the moment and reduces the chatter in the mind.

MOVE & SHAKE

The simple act of shaking helps to release the chemical cortisol from our bodies, which is rife when we're feeling anxious. Too much cortisol can lower our immune system and we become susceptible to getting run down and getting colds easily.

Animals shake after they have been through something traumatic to get rid of cortisol. Go ahead and shake away!



Getting some fresh air even for 10 minutes will boost vitamin D levels and ensure we have the melatonin to help us sleep at night.

Check out some virtual tours you can see online.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/project/virtual-tours>

Print off some pictures of the outdoors and stick them around the house. Seeing outdoor images tells the body there is something beautiful to look at and accesses the calming part of our nervous system.

Even moving a little helps the circulation of your body and gets rid of toxins, whilst boosting the happy chemical 'endorphin' in our brains.



Try to go for walks being mindful of social distancing. If you are unable to walk, there are many YouTube exercise videos for seated or standing and many different types such as yoga, HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training), dancing or create your own and build it into your daily routine.

You could do some brief exercise or stretching while the kettle boils.

IF YOU CAN'T GET OUT



SLEEP



When we do wake in the night, to get ourselves back to sleep rather than worrying about the sleep, focus on relaxing or calming activities if you can.

Putting pressure on ourselves to go back to sleep does the reverse and keeps us awake, so do things that will calm you; such as reading, crosswords, wordsearches, calming music or guided meditation.

There is no doubt that some of us will have had our sleep disrupted during this time. Doing activities to relax will help to aid sleep, some examples are, a warm bath or shower, reading/listening to a book (many local libraries have online access to free books) and calming music. By going up an hour or 1/2 hour before you'd sleep, starts the relaxing process and this tells your body to get ready for sleep.



Phone apps such as Calm and Headspace have meditative stories to help sleep as does white noise from YouTube or Spotify or other music streaming.

FINALLY...

Uncertainty is uncomfortable, it's a limbo state where we don't know whether we are coming or going, this puts our body on edge and impacts our state of mind.

Stay with each minute, hour or day at a time because this is going to end, we don't know when, but it will.

Uniquely we are all in this situation together so kindness to ourselves and others will help this all feel a lot easier.

with love and warmth,

Suni Parmar-Rea (MBACP Accred., CPsychol.)