

# Wellbeing Guide

## 2020



### **DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE**

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## Introduction

Hello and welcome to this new guide intended to support all of our colleagues in managing their wellbeing during these unprecedented times as the world tackles the COVID-19 outbreak. It is written to give helpful advice and pragmatic tools to everyone. We will all be experiencing very different emotions during this time, with differing work and family pressures. We hope you will find this useful and take advantage of some of the tips and tools.

The University has provided a short guide online for wellbeing as well. It can be found here: [https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus\\_wellbeing\\_mentalhealth](https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus_wellbeing_mentalhealth)

# Managing General Wellbeing

## Working from Home

Rule Number One – remember, this isn't a permanent situation.

Rule Number Two – No one is productive all day. Working at home means you get your commuting time back, there are fewer inessential meetings. Base your expectations of a productive day on how much actual uninterrupted working time and learning time you get in a typical day.

There are days when this is going to be frustrating, when systems are not as fast as usual, when people do not respond as quickly. As they say in Frozen - let it go - there are going to be times when things do not go according to plan.

## *Technology*

We have a lot of technology at our finger tips to keep us connected. Ensure you have assessed your workstation using the university [Display Screen Equipment checklist](#). Be mindful that you won't have everything you usually do in your office but try everything you can to get the appropriate equipment and take regular breaks from your "desk".

Microsoft Teams is the best way to stay connected with colleagues – it is supported by the university and it is more secure than some of the other conferencing tools available.

You can find tips and guides on remote working on the [Intranet](#).

It can be difficult to switch off from the technology as well – set boundaries with work. Switch off your apps and devices after your working day is complete. Make the distinction between work life and personal life!

## Physical Health

Our physical health has a big impact on how we feel. It can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour. With many of us sitting at workstations that are unusual and in some cases, not ideal, it is important that you take regular breaks to get up and move around. If you are finding it difficult to remember to take breaks there are [a number of free apps](#) you can use to remind you.

If you find sitting all day is giving you a sore back, you can try some of the stretches recommended by a physiotherapist in [this video](#) from the NHS.

Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink plenty of water and exercise regularly. If you exercise outside of your house, stay 2 metres from others. Also consider having some meetings over the telephone while walking, rather than always sat at a computer screen!

There are hundreds of online at home workouts available online. Below are a few suggestions for you to give a try depending on your fitness levels!

<https://yogawithadriene.com/30days/> - A free 30 day yoga class

<https://www.youtube.com> – Can search for a variety of online fitness classes suiting all levels of fitness, from armchair yoga to full body workouts in your home.

<https://www.youtube.com/c/POPSUGARFitness/videos> - A Home aerobics channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1> - Stretches and aerobics

[Home workplace setup](#) - Milton Chiropractic Clinic provides exercises for the back.

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/fitness/a31792038/coronavirus-live-stream-workout-classes/> - Free classes for everyone

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio> - NHS Fitness Studio exercise videos

## Mental Health

All of us will experience anxiety during this time of varying levels. Firstly, identify your trigger points for anxiety. Your triggers could range from a certain time of the day to feeling anxious about joining online meetings.

There are lots of things you can do to help yourself.

- Make time for yourself, relax and do things you enjoy
- Eat healthily; get plenty of sleep and exercise
- Spend time with people you love even if this is virtually
- Talk about your problems with people you trust
- Be proud of what you're good at, as well as aware of what you struggle with
- Pay attention to what you're feeling.
- If you've stopped doing things you usually love, you're tearful, not eating or sleeping properly, drifting from people close to you, talk to someone you trust.

Also remember it is important to set boundaries. Many of us may feel overloaded with requests from friends, family and colleagues to check in with us via video or telephone calls. Set hours during which you will talk to your friends and family so that you can have some “down” time as you would usually. We are not used to having people “visit” us at any hour of the day and the loss of your personal downtime could have a negative effect. Make sure you keep the time available to do things that you enjoy.

It is also important to make sure you are achieving a healthy work/life balance and are not running yourself ragged. As we approach a period of fewer daylight hours and continued pressures in various aspects of our lives, you are encouraged to submit requests to **work flexibly** on a temporary basis. Information on the department's flexible working policy can be found [here](#).

## *Mental Health First Aiders*

The University has a team of Mental Health First Aiders who can support you at this time. Their details can be found here. Please bear in mind that the telephone numbers provided are unlikely to connect you at this time so perhaps an email initially may be the best way to set up a call with them. You will find their email addresses on the global address book in Outlook.

<https://www.medschl.cam.ac.uk/human-resources/staff-wellbeing/wellbeing-a-z/mental-health-first-aid-training/>

## *Relaxation exercises*

### 1. Controlled breathing

It might sound simple, but controlled breathing can be a useful tool for feeling calmer quickly and reducing feelings of stress and anxiety. This technique is easy to memorise and can be practised almost anywhere. Practise this for as long as you need to feel the benefits.

To practise this technique, all you need to do is this:

- Breathe in for four seconds
- Hold your breath for four seconds
- Breathe out for four seconds
- Wait four seconds before repeating

Keep repeating this until you start to feel calmer. Look for both mental and physical signs, like your thoughts and your heartbeat slowing down.

You may already know what triggers your negative thoughts and feelings. If you do, try using this breathing technique if you know you will encounter a certain trigger, or immediately after.

### 2. Muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing and releasing pairs of muscles in sequence. It can help if you imagine tension leaving your body as you release your muscles.

You'll need a quiet, private space for this to work well. Find somewhere to sit, with your feet planted shoulder width apart, flat on the ground. You might like to read through the steps of this simple technique first, then practise without any guidance, and you may want to use the breathing exercise above before you use this one.

We'll start with the muscles in your head. Tense your forehead muscles by raising your eyebrows and holding for up to 10 seconds. Then release, imagining tension leaving your body.

Repeat this, working down through pairs of muscles throughout your body. Try to tense them for up to 10 seconds before releasing.

When you've finished, don't get up straight away. Stay where you are for a minute or so, then, when you do get up, do so slowly. You can practise this technique whenever you notice yourself becoming stressed or anxious.

## *Sources of information and advice*

Top Tips for looking after your mental health during the outbreak have been provided by the many organisations and can be found here:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

University of Cambridge Clinical School Wellbeing Page: <https://wellbeing.medschl.cam.ac.uk/#>

Internal Wellbeing Support Services: <https://wellbeing.medschl.cam.ac.uk/internal-support-services/>

External Wellbeing Support Services: <https://wellbeing.medschl.cam.ac.uk/external-support-services/>

## *If you're worried about someone else during the coronavirus outbreak – advice from the Samaritans*

New social distancing and self-isolation rules are changing the way we keep in touch. If you're worried about someone who may already be struggling, we've got some tips that might come in handy.

We know how important human connection is. And we're aware of how hard life might be for a lot of people when we have to stay at home.

Now more than ever we need to keep our connections strong. It might feel more difficult to mention to someone that you're worried about them, but being physically distant from one another doesn't mean we need to be socially isolated. Reaching out to someone can make a big difference if they're going through a tough time.

During this period of uncertainty, we want to help you feel confident supporting others who may be struggling. You are not alone. If you think somebody might need help, trust your instincts and strike up a conversation.

Although we can't always see each other, it doesn't mean we can't communicate. You can still show compassion and empathy through messaging apps, virtual communities and on the phone.

It can be a video call, a phone call, a text, a DM or a chat over the garden fence. You could use this time to write a letter or an email, too. Starting a conversation and showing you care can be the first step to helping someone feel less isolated.

There's no right or wrong way to get started. Trust your instincts and remember that you chat with people in lots of different ways every day.

It's also okay if you don't get a response straight away. If they don't answer, they may still have read your message or seen your call. That notification buzz can be enough to interrupt someone's thoughts and may encourage them to reach out for support.

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/worried-about-someone-else/if-youre-worried-about-someone-else-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>

## Managing Anxiety

The coronavirus outbreak means that life is changing for all of us for a while. It may cause us to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored, lonely or frustrated. It is OK to feel this way and everyone reacts differently. Remember this situation is temporary.

- Stay connected with people – Video calls / socially distanced walks
- Talk about your worries with your friends and family
- Support and help others – Helping others can also make you feel better!
- Feel prepared – Ensuring you have done the proper preparation for meetings can help boost your confidence and reduce anxiety
- Look after your body – Regular exercise has been shown to improve mood and energy levels
- Stay on top of difficult feelings – If you feel like things are getting on top of you, sometimes the best thing to do can be to walk away and give yourself time to refresh before another attempt
- Do things you enjoy – While this situation is not forever, try not to put your whole life on hold until it's over. Continue to pursue your hobbies and passions where possible to keep yourself stimulated.
- Focus on the present – The uncertainty of the future can be a powerful trigger for anxiety. If you begin feeling overwhelmed then try to focus on a smaller achievable task to get the ball rolling.
- Look after your sleep

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/>

The University Counselling Service has also put together a wide array of self-help tools for dealing with anxiety, depression, stress and many other issues shared by many at this time:

<https://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/selfhelp>



# Managing Loneliness

For some of our colleagues living far from relatives and friends at the moment, it will be a difficult time. It is important to remember that you are not alone.

On Microsoft Teams we have created a channel called “PHPC Break Room”. Use this channel to talk to colleagues. We will host coffee mornings on here at 10.30 every Tuesday and Thursday for 30 minutes for those who want to join.

There are also a number of other channels aimed at different groups of colleagues to share their experiences and top tips. Please join and get involved!

Make sure you stay connected with your line manager and colleagues in your team. There are many support services for people who are struggling so if you are a bit lost, feed in through your line manager or peers and the department will do its best to help.

Think of some out-of-the-box ways to stay in contact with friends and family, for example,

- Send a handwritten letter or postcard (or send one online)
- Call someone on the telephone
- Video call
- Play virtual games
- Send gifts by post

Use social media to stay connected with friends, family and colleagues. Try to avoid unhelpful, unreliable sources of information: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-51931394>

Some communities have formed neighbourhood support groups, plus you can volunteer through the NHS to provide community support: <https://nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk/>

- Keep to a schedule
- Set yourself attainable and achievable tasks and goals
- Stay informed
- Find sources of comfort, for example,
  - Take a bath
  - Focus on a pet
  - Cook a healthy comfort food
  - Watch your favourite TV show
  - Play video games
  - Research your next adventure
  - Organise a virtual dinner party
  - If you have a windowbox or garden then plant flowers for bees and butterflies, or vegetables (many garden centres still deliver)
  - Actually get those pesky DIY jobs done!
  - Put up a birdfeeder ([www.rspb.org.uk/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/))
  - Walk outside (maintaining social distance from others)



## Balancing work and caring responsibilities

For many colleagues at the moment, caring responsibilities (whether this be childcare, elderly care, sick relative care or professional care via clinical work) will be the biggest stress to manage. “Super-saturation” of your time is difficult to handle. We hope the following tips may take some of the stress out of your situation. Do not be shy to reach out to friends, colleagues and relatives for support if you need it and it can be done safely.

The pressures and challenges of having children home or caring for a dependent have been magnified due to Covid-19. Many of us already have these responsibilities and have found ways to balance the demands of work and home life.

If you are caring for a dependent during this time and are unable to work (either your full hours or at all) please contact your line manager and HR Coordinator Lynette Watson at [ps.admin@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ps.admin@medschl.cam.ac.uk) further information can be found at [www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus-homeworking](http://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus-homeworking)

One of the keys to balancing work and home in this new way of working is to try and have structure and boundaries. It helps you focus and be able to step away at the end of the day.

Make a list of things you need to do before you start your working day. Here are a few suggestions:

- a. Make yourself a coffee (or tea)
- b. If you have children and they are still sleeping – let them – enjoy the quiet time.
- c. If you have meetings in the morning – look at how you can structure the children’s morning – most schools have provided online lessons and the following links – dependent on the ages – may be of use: there is also going to be a Teams parent chat room which will have recommendations on on-line learning and other child interesting information.

<https://www.bbc.com/education>

[www.ichild.co.uk](http://www.ichild.co.uk)

[www.openculture.com](http://www.openculture.com)

[www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk)

- d. Change out of your pyjamas - you may be inclined to nap rather than be motivated to work
- e. Open Teams/Slack and rejoin your working environment – it’s vitally important to keep in touch with colleagues – even if it is a virtual coffee! Keep your routine intact
- f. Breathe! Take a break – walk around the garden or around the block (part of your one a day foray into the world)
- g. Ask for help – your colleagues are still there – you don’t have to solve every problem on your own. The brains are still there for you to storm.
- h. Take advantage of the flexibility that working from home can bring - if the children have been great and didn’t appear during an important video conference, take time out to play with them as a thank you. If you don’t have children, take a break after staying focused

on a video call or finishing a challenging report. It is vitally important to have regular breaks.

- i. There is a lot of information on social media, television, radio regarding covid-19 – it can be overwhelming and can cause anxiousness. Have a break from the news!

You may have plenty of work that can be done from home, but we will share other COVID-19 specific research opportunities as well in case you have capacity to help. Please do check with your line manager.

## Motivation

Remaining motivated after all of this time working from home can be challenging so here are a few tips which may help you to stay engaged:

- If you feel like you have too many tasks to accomplish it can seem impossible even to know where to start. Try setting yourself a few specific tasks each day and focus on completing those.
- If you are getting bogged down with a particular task, try going and doing something else for a while and come back to it. You may find this helps with your mental block!
- You could schedule a regular morning meeting with a colleague each day to go over your plans for the day and a general chat.
- If you are tired of staring at the same four walls every day then talk to the reception team. There may be capacity for you to come into the office occasionally for a change of environment!

## Fun Stuff!

Here we've provided a few light hearted links of fun things to fill your time whilst working remotely!

<https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/news/a7970/7-online-quizzes-that-are-actually-worth-taking/>

<https://www.5minutemystery.com>

<https://www.funquizzes.uk>

<https://theguardian.com/crosswords>

<https://www.boatloadpuzzles.com/playcrossword>

<https://sudoku.com>

<https://digitaldefynd.com/best-drawing-course-class-lessons>

<https://onlinejigsawpuzzles.net>

<https://tabletopia.com/>

## Summary

Remember through all of this, we are here to support you. We will update this guide with links as time goes on. Think about the following questions and let us know how you are getting on via the MS Teams channels.

- Please let us know what is working for you.
- How are you managing your time?
- How are you managing to exercise?
- Tell us more about how you might structure your day.
- How are you managing to keep in touch with colleagues?
- Do you need some support linking up with others who are in the same circumstance as you?

More than ever we need to communicate and share with each other as we move through this transition of finding a new 'normal'. There is a way forward, you are not alone, but we need to know when you feel this way in order to help change how you feel.

In these challenging circumstances, remember that you are a member of a resourceful Department and colleagues with whom you can connect. We will send regular updates, newsletters, opportunities to chat to colleagues, and will also offer virtual seminars.

We hope that you will find the suggestions in this Guide useful, and feel free to offer your own suggestions and resource recommendations as well.

Despite our geographical challenges, we are still a team - still dependent upon one another, still supporting one another. Now, more than ever, we need to keep connected and know that it is business as usual. Our activities, teaching and research whether related to the COVID-19 pandemic or other conditions, health care needs and services, are relevant and essential.