

North Central Older People's Community Team

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Looking after your mental health while Coronavirus is in the community

We are living in strange and uncertain times and it is perfectly natural to be worried, scared, sad or frustrated. Everyone in the UK has been asked to stay at home by the government, and many of those with underlying health conditions have been advised not to leave their house at all. There may be many things that feel out of our control at the moment, however there are things that we can take control of to help look after ourselves. The Older People's Community Team at NSFT have developed some guidance about looking after your mental health during these unsettling times.

There are a number of free phone helplines which you can contact if you are finding it difficult to cope.

You can phone the Samaritans on **116 123**. This line is open 24 hours a day, every day.

The Silver Line is a helpline for older adults and can be contacted on **0800 4 70 80 90**. This line is open 24 hours a day, every day.

If at any time you do not feel safe on your own and are worried that there is an immediate risk that you might hurt yourself, or an immediate risk to your safety or the safety of someone else call 999.

1. **Daily routine.** When we are feeling low, it can be difficult finding motivation and we might not feel like doing very much. Not having structure in our days can make it difficult to stay as productive and active as we would normally. This can lead to spending more time worrying. All of this can have a big impact on our mood and how we feel about ourselves. Keeping a structured daily routine can help us avoid this vicious cycle. Try to plan one or two main activities for your morning, afternoon and evening.

2. **Physical health.** All the things we would normally do to look after our physical health are equally important in helping us to look after our mental health.

Diet. Spending a lot of time at home may make us more likely to eat snacks and treats more often than we normally would. Alternatively, some people may notice they lose their appetite when they are feeling more anxious. Try to stick to the meals you would normally have in a day and if you do feel like a snack in between try to choose a healthy option, e.g. fruit or yoghurt.

Exercise. Staying active may feel challenging at the moment, but physical activity can really help to boost our mood as well as our immune system. It is important to make sure that you choose exercises that feel safe for you and do not cause pain. Try out some gentle exercises and find out what works for you.

Sleep. One of the most common things that can get in the way of a good night's sleep is worrying and a lot of us may find ourselves worrying more than usual at the moment. To help maintain a healthy sleep routine, try to make sure that you only use your bed for sleeping. Try to avoid napping for long periods during the day. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day can create a sleep pattern that our body is familiar with and can make it easier to fall asleep.

3. **Active Mind.** In the same way that staying physically active can help keep our muscles in shape, it is important to keep our minds engaged and active to maintain brain function. Try to identify some indoor activities that you might enjoy that will keep your mind active e.g. reading, painting, crafts, puzzle books.
4. **Limit news time.** It is sensible to stay up to date with what is happening and what the latest advice is from the government but spending a lot of time watching the news or reading newspapers can increase how worried we are feeling. Checking your trusted news sources once a day should be enough to keep you up-to-date without feeling overwhelmed.
5. **Stay connected.** Having to stay at home may leave you feeling isolated or lonely. This can have a huge impact on how we're feeling, so it's really important to stay connected to others even if you can't meet them face to face. Talking to your friends and family on the phone will benefit not only your own wellbeing, but theirs too. If you have a computer, you can also communicate via emails. Looking at photographs of your friends and family might help remind you of good memories you shared with them. You could also try writing a letter or making a card for someone and ask a trusted neighbour to post this for you.
6. **Managing anxiety.** When we feel threatened or worried, as many of us may be feeling right now, our body responds by activating our 'fight or flight' mode to try and protect us. You might notice your heart beating faster than usual, your breathing speeding up and you might feel shaky or even nauseous. We can help manage our anxiety and turn off our 'fight or flight' response by activating our 'rest and digest' response instead. Deep breathing can be one way of achieving this. Try breathing slowly in through your nose for four seconds, hold the breath for four seconds and breathe slowly out through your mouth for six seconds. Place a hand on your stomach as you do this and notice the rise and fall of your stomach with each breath in and each breath out. Try practicing this for at least two minutes, or 5 to 10 minutes if you feel able. You can try using this strategy to help yourself wind down at night before you go to bed.