

Protecting Your Mental Health during Coronavirus

(Information developed and shared by Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for NHS staff)



There are a lot of unknowns at the minute and this can be unsettling, scary and/or frustrating. We can only do our best to maintain the quality of the clinical/practitioner care we offer, whilst respecting the safe working guidance.

We all respond differently and have different skills, experiences and personal circumstances. To be kind towards ourselves and each other is always important, but possibly even more so during this uncertain period.

Many of us are likely to feel some increased levels of worry or anxiety due to the situation we find ourselves in at home and at work. Although feeling anxiety in response to a perceived threat is a normal human reaction, sustained high levels of anxiety can take its toll on us and have impacts on our well-being in the longer term. Those who already suffer from anxiety are especially likely to have a hard time during the coronavirus pandemic. The following suggestions can help you deal with these uncertain times.

Everyday Working

- If you have any worries or concerns (however silly you may feel they are), please do not keep them to yourself – talk to your manager or a colleague
- If you feel unwell, or need to self-isolate, please consider the safety of yourself and others, and do so responsibly. Do NOT beat yourself up about not being at work but be considerate to needs of others
- If you're feeling overwhelmed or triggered by the circumstances and ever changing information about Coronavirus, please raise this with your manager, they can support decisions with respect to your experience.
- Limit the amount of time that you are exposed to information that could be inflammatory or scaremongering to that which is essential, evidenced and appropriate, whilst in and out of work. To reduce levels of worry and anxiety limit your exposure to coronavirus news to **no more than 30 minutes a day**. Please focus on trusted sources of information (e.g. NHS and government websites) and mute, reduce or unfollow triggering accounts, pages or key words on social media forums (e.g. Twitter/Facebook).
- Please be mindful to your colleagues and their well-being. Check in with each other, support teams and individuals where possible, but do not go above your own physical capabilities, especially at times where you may feel unwell.
- This will be a marathon, not a sprint, so give yourself and others the time and space to adjust to different working patterns or ways of doing things that might be needed in the next weeks and months.

Self-Isolating (when well) or Working from Home

- Try to keep a regular routine (e.g. maintain usual bed and meal times), with some variety in your activities (e.g. Saturday may involve different activities than Tuesday)
- Set daily goals to keep yourself focused
- Maintain some level of physical activity (e.g. HIIT routine, online Yoga/Pilates, solitary walking, gardening etc.)
- Achieve daily exposure to natural sunlight where ever possible
- Keep hydrated
- Allocate some time each day for restful activities and purposeful relaxation which works for you, particularly if your anxiety increases (e.g. art and crafts, playing music, prayer, breathing, talking with friends and meditation)
- Keep in touch with family and friends on a daily basis
- If you are working from home, try to maintain your usual hours. Check in with colleagues via phone, skype and email, set yourself tasks for the day and take regular, short comfort breaks.
- If you notice increase worry or anxiety, you could try the **Apple Technique** (AnxietyUK):
 - **Acknowledge** – notice the uncertainty as it comes into your mind
 - **Pause** – pause and breathe (don't react at all)
 - **Pull Back** – tell yourself that it's just the worry talking. The apparent need for certainty is not necessary or helpful. Thoughts are not always facts.
 - **Let Go** – let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to it. Visualise it passing by like leaves in a stream.
 - **Explore** – explore right now. Notice your breathing, and then what you can see, what you can hear, what you can touch and what you can smell. Then shift your attention back on to what you were doing or on to something new.