

## **COVID-19 – Psychosocial Considerations**

We are entering a phase where all of us have to work differently and adopt new behaviours. This will become our new 'normal'. It won't last forever. But it may last a number of months, and so pacing ourselves as much as possible is important. Even doing a task that is familiar will be challenging – unfamiliar environment or in PPE. There is the potential for things to take longer, and for distress and fatigue. It is important to be patient with yourself and colleagues as we adapt and learn new ways of delivering care.

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## Self-care

It is normal to feel stressed and under enormous pressure during this time. Admitting this isn't a sign of weakness or failure to do your job. Managing mental health and psychological wellbeing is as important as managing your physical health.

- Take care of yourself: Try and ensure enough rest and respite between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.
- Consider coping strategies: Using strategies that have worked for you in the past are most likely to help de-stress now. However, consider learning simple techniques to relax and manage anxiety. Please see below for a list of useful Apps. Remember this is not a sprint, it's a marathon and we need to pace ourselves.
- Stay connected: Some healthcare workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear, or may have to avoid their family due to national or regional methods of social distancing. This can make a challenging situation more difficult. Stay connected with loved ones through digital methods to maintain social contact.
- You are part of a team: However well we prepare, we are all vulnerable and find particular incidents difficult. Talk to your colleagues about what is concerning you and ask for help if you need it. Remember to talk about positive things too (acts of kindness or skill) particularly when the situation is so challenging.
- Mind set: Focus on what you can do, rather than what you can't. Accept that while you and the system are doing your best, there will be times when the outcome is not what we would wish or can reasonably prevent.

Self-care is often summarised as:

<b>A</b>	<b>Awareness of your own responses and how this might be varying from your usual</b> Most responses to stress are normal human reactions to abnormal events, but the below image is useful to indicate when you might benefit from additional support
<b>B</b>	<b>Balance</b> This is trying to get some time away from high pressure roles and time completely away from your role. In that time, being able to engage in your usual routines for managing stress i.e. going for a walk/run, spending time outdoors or engaged in other activities.
<b>C</b>	<b>Connection</b> Evidence suggests that social connectedness is our best buffer against stress. The current situation means we need to think creatively about how to maintain social connectedness, but take opportunities to connect with colleagues, your social networks and your organisational supports.

## Going Home Checklist

### Going home checklist

- ✓ Take a moment to think about today.
- ✓ Acknowledge one thing that was difficult during your working day - let it go.
- ✓ Consider three things that went well.
- ✓ Check on your colleagues before you leave - are they OK?
- ✓ Are you OK? Your senior team are here to support you.
- ✓ Now switch your attention to home - rest and recharge.



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## Useful Apps



**Mind Shift** is a mental health app designed specifically for teens and young adults with anxiety. Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations.

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**Self Help for Anxiety Management** might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time, and learn 25 different self-help techniques. You can also use SAM's "Social Cloud" feature to confidentially connect with other users in an online community for additional support.

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**Happify**. Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts.

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The **Headspace** app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus. The app also has a handy "get some headspace" reminder to encourage you to keep practicing each day.

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**Calm** provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music. This app is truly universal; whether you've never tried meditation before or regularly practice, you'll find the perfect program for you.

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**Smiling Mind** is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. Smiling Mind is a unique tool developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life. This is really helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind

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## **Self-Isolation**

Self-isolation which may happen to many people during a pandemic, is unusual. Stress, boredom and worries about personal health, family, friends and co-workers can feel worse when separated from normal support networks. These are normal feelings in for such an unusual situation. Below are some tips for managing during self-isolation.

- **Stay connected:** Try as much as possible to maintain your social networks (friends, family, cultural and faith groups) using e-mail, social media, video conference and telephone. Talk to others about your experiences and how you are feeling, be open and honest (others are probably feeling the same way!). Experiment with new ways of keeping in touch.
- **Maintain a routine:** Maintain familiar daily routines and schedules as much as possible, or create new ones in a new environment. Exercise regularly (consider online exercise videos/yoga), cleaning/daily chores, keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy food.
- **Family time:** Maintain a tone of positive family time in the household. It is essential to work together as a household to manage tensions and provide positive support to children, elderly and vulnerable family members, all need to feel safe. Model positive behaviours for children. Be conscious of the use of language or the expression of strong emotion.
- **Regulate information access:** Minimise watching, reading or listening to the constant news reports. Access information from trusted resources and at specific times of the day (once or twice). Consider turning off 'notifications' from news apps on your mobile phone.
- **Use the time productively:** Instead of dwelling on what might happen, think about positive plans and goals for the future. Try new things or projects that you haven't had time to before (e.g. that book you always meant to read).

Be aware that difficult feelings and thoughts may last for longer than you might expect – days or even weeks. These reactions are normal when faced with a stressful event, and will get better for most people. Some people may experience persistent problems that interfere severely with your sleep or role functioning. Such persistent problems may be a sign that you could benefit from seeking help for your mental health.

## **Looking After Colleagues**

In these uncertain times, it is now even more important that we look after each other. We are all doing our best, and it is important to be kind to each other, listen and be patient.

- Off work/self-isolating: These colleagues are still part of the team; maintain contact and if possible, find them tasks to maintain everyone's involvement. They may well be feeling guilty that they are unable to be at work with you.
- Communication: Ask your colleagues how they are coping and encourage them to share worries or concerns. But also encourage sharing success stories, acts of kindness or situations where people worked well together. These stories are of equal, if not more importance.
- Team work: Spread the work amongst the team and ensure that there is a balance between harder and easier tasks.
- Buddy System. Offer colleagues in your department the opportunity to have a named "buddy". Buddies then make sure that they check up on each other during this difficult time and provide individual wellbeing support.

Over the next few months, increased working hours, more complex working environments and difficult decision making will lead to increased physical and emotional fatigue and the risk of burnout. At the best of times, burnout can be difficult to recognise and diagnose. Below are some signs and symptoms to be aware of in yourself and in your colleagues:

- Increased anger, irritability or impatience
- Treating patients as objects, emotionally distant or depleted
- Frequently absent from or unable to leave work
- Insomnia and tiredness
- Emotional exhaustion – this manifests as both physical fatigue and a sense of being psychologically 'drained'
- Depersonalisation – unfeeling and impersonal attitudes and reactions towards others
- Sense of low personal accomplishment – feeling they no longer achieve anything remarkable and are wasting their time. A feeling of failure and insufficiency suggests a lack of trust in their own abilities

Be alert for these signs and symptoms in yourself and colleagues. If you recognise any of these please talk to a colleague or friend and access help.

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