

TOP TIPS

Our work at Adfam supports families and loved ones of those with substance use problems to stay healthy and well, in spite of their circumstances. The current global pandemic of the Covid-19 virus is resulting in unprecedented changes to our lives for the coming weeks. Many of these changes, we know, will put additional strain on families we support. Already challenging circumstances may become even more difficult.

Whilst a lot may feel out of our control, and there is a lot of uncertainty, it's crucial that we take steps to maintain and improve our own wellbeing and resilience. Whilst it's often tempting to think of others first, paying attention to our own self-care means that we are better able to also support others.

There is a lot of advice out there for staying well. We've pulled together a selection of the best. We'll continue to share new ideas over the coming weeks. Please check our social media and website if you'd like to.

Some Tips for if you're staying at home

#1 Create Routine or structure

Whilst an unstructured day can feel like a treat from time to time, it isn't good for our wellbeing in the longer term. Make a plan that includes:

- Getting up and dressed, and going to bed at reasonable times
- Regular mealtimes
- Exercise
- Relaxation and down-time
- Breaks from screen time if you're working

#2 Make time for 'micro lifts'

Everyday life is peppered with small interactions and choices which help us feel good, without even realising. Exchanging greetings with colleagues, sharing a joke, picking up a coffee from our favourite shop, walking through the park to an appointment. The cumulative impact of not having these can be huge over an extended period of time. Instead, aim to plan times to connect with others, try something new, watch something funny, cook a new dish or generate a sense of achievement (declutter a cupboard?)

With thanks to Dr Lucy Atcheson via www.independent.co.uk

#3 Eat healthily

The food we eat plays a huge role in how we feel. Eating a balanced diet helps keep us alert and well. Fresh fruit and vegetables, in particular, are key to a strong immune system. Try to minimise or eliminate alcohol and avoid or minimise sugary, processed or fatty foods, especially if you are less active. You may otherwise find yourself feeling lethargic, struggling to sleep well or focus, and feeling low or irritable.

#4 Engage with nature

If you have a garden or outside space – make use of it. If you're able to go out to parks and other public natural spaces, make time to do so. Even if you are inside, watching birds or seeing trees through the window can help; take time to tend your houseplants or grow something new. Open the window to let in fresh air.

#5 Beware of screens!

It can be easy to slide into almost permanent screen-time – watching TV, texting or using social media, video-calling or working on a computer; using apps or games to while away the time; using online videos as guides or inspiration; or even online educational activities for children. Even if you use online materials as a resource, try to take time away from screens. Scour your shelves for unread books or magazines; rediscover an old music collection; do arts and crafts; cook or bake; journal or write letters rather than typing or emailing; do DIY, spend time in the garden; try meditation or relaxation techniques; talk to others (not through a screen!).

#6 Exercise or move around

If you're able to go outside for runs, walks or cycles, then do so each day. Exercise routines are available online and you may have weights, a skipping rope or other training equipment that you can use. Regular movement and exercise is essential to our health. Especially when we are feeling stress or anxiety, movement is important to help move the stress through our bodies and calm us, as well as to generate endorphins which improve our mood.

Even if you can't go outside or do more vigorous exercise indoors, gentle stretches and other exercises can be a big help.

#7 Limit your news intake or social media

If you're becoming anxious, stressed, upset, irritable or depressed watching the news or using social media – restrict your use. The current guidelines are likely to be in place for some time. Remaining in a state of high alert as we seek out more and more information and then react and respond, is not good for long-term health. Try to limit your engagement with news to once or twice per day. Leaving the TV or radio on in the background can significantly affect our mood or state of mind, even if we think we're not paying attention. If you like background noise or music, choose channels with limited news coverage, or play music from your collection or an app.

#8 Try and avoid being drawn into a negative thought spiral

Lots of time to think and reflect can result in us negatively critiquing ourselves and our lives. The next few months will feel different, there is a lot of uncertainty, and planning is difficult. All of this can contribute to anxiety, or a sense of stagnation or helplessness. Try to see this time as a break in normal life – it is a different phase, which provides opportunities as well as challenges. Think about what you can achieve and control, rather than what you can't. Declutter, sort or organise; use the opportunity to try new things; do a craft or photo project; read unread novels; create new routines to your day to do things that you 'never normally have time for'. Further tips for remaining positive and reducing stress are below.

With thanks to Dr Lucy Atcheson via www.independent.co.uk

#9 Take time to be mindful and take notice

The benefits of mindfulness are well documented. Returning our focus to the present moment can reduce stress and improve wellbeing. It can bring improvements to physical and psychological symptoms and promote positive changes in behaviour and mood. Mindfulness practices can include paying closer attention whilst eating (to the taste of the food and sensations as you eat), walking or sitting quietly; meditation which focuses on your breath, or body sensations, or repeating a mantra. Naming and accepting your emotions in the present moment is another helpful mindful practice. We often unconsciously distract ourselves, suppress or numb particular emotions. Accepting that we feel scared, sad, angry, or even happy, can help to release or move through these feelings. More specific practices and ideas can be found at the link below, and on many other websites and videos online.

With thanks to <https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm>

#10 Give

Giving is one of the '5 ways to wellbeing', recognised to improve our mood and mental health. There are many ways to give, even whilst confined to our home. We can give of time by calling those who may be isolated or lonely. We can take time to send notes, postcards or letters to loved ones, or to take part in a local scheme to support those who are in isolation. Or there are ways to give financially, if that is possible for you, to support those in need in the current crisis or with many other, ongoing challenges.

For more ideas

There are so many websites, blogs and videos online with guided meditations and other ideas. Here are some we've found. Please note that these sites are intended as helpful suggestions. They are not endorsed by Adfam and we take no responsibility for content of external sites:

<https://www.facebook.com/biglifejournal/>

<https://thegreenparent.co.uk/articles/read/lockdown-life-savers>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health>