

Westfield Health

Key worker support pack

A guide on how to protect and boost
your wellbeing during coronavirus

www.westfieldhealth.com





About Westfield Health

We're dedicated to making a healthy difference to the quality of life of our customers and the communities in which they live and work.

We inspire and empower each other to be the best that we can be, so we can deliver evidence-based health and wellbeing solutions that support people, communities, and workplaces to be healthier.

We're proud of our not for profit heritage and are passionate about making a healthy difference. We have no shareholders, so the more successful we are the more we can give back to those around us.

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Introduction

COVID-19 has already brought major changes to our lives. Whilst many people are working from home, key workers are still in the workplace keeping the country moving.

From getting to work with limited public transport to increased health worries, being at work during the COVID-19 outbreak comes with its own unique set of challenges and stresses.

In this Key worker support pack, we'll be exploring different ways to look after your personal wellbeing during this difficult time.

Remember: If you're struggling to cope with increased anxiety levels, contact your GP via phone for further advice and support.

Stress and pressure



With the added workload and responsibility that comes with being a key worker during coronavirus, it can lead to increased pressure and stress.

In this section, we'll be looking at the difference between pressure and stress, the physical impact of stress and techniques you can use to help you manage both.

What is pressure?

When we think of pressure, we usually think of it in a negative way, but there's a close relationship between pressure and performance.

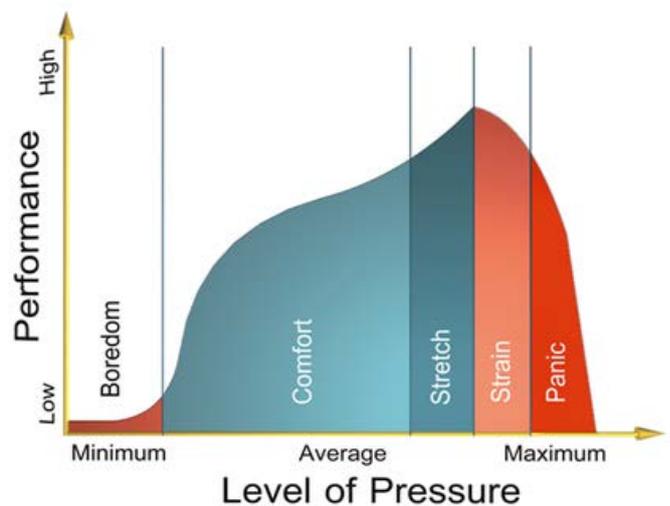
Whether it's elite athletes or a challenging shift at work, the right amount of pressure can help us focus and perform at our best.

However, when we're under too much pressure or we work under a lot of pressure for too long, we tip over into the 'strain' zone. This is called the pressure-performance curve.

To stay balanced, we need to move back and forth between the stretch and comfort zones, giving us time to recover.

If we're always in the stretch zone, it quickly turns into strain and even burnout.

Learning to recognise your personal signs of being under strain and how to navigate back to your comfort zone is key to managing pressure.



Exercise:

What are your signs of being in the strain zone?

When that happens, how could you bring it back to your comfort zone to recover?

What is stress?

When the pressure becomes too much and we end up in the strain zone, we begin to feel a lot of stress.

Mental health charity Mind defines stress as situations and events that put us under pressure or our reaction to the pressure of stressful events and situations.

Stress isn't just a mental phenomenon. Because body and mind are so interconnected, the effects of stress present in the body.

Similarly, looking after our bodies can help alleviate the stress we feel in our minds. The brain is connected to the body via the nervous system.

When our mind and body are disconnected, we may experience signs of imbalance, including feelings of stress, fatigue, loneliness and depression.

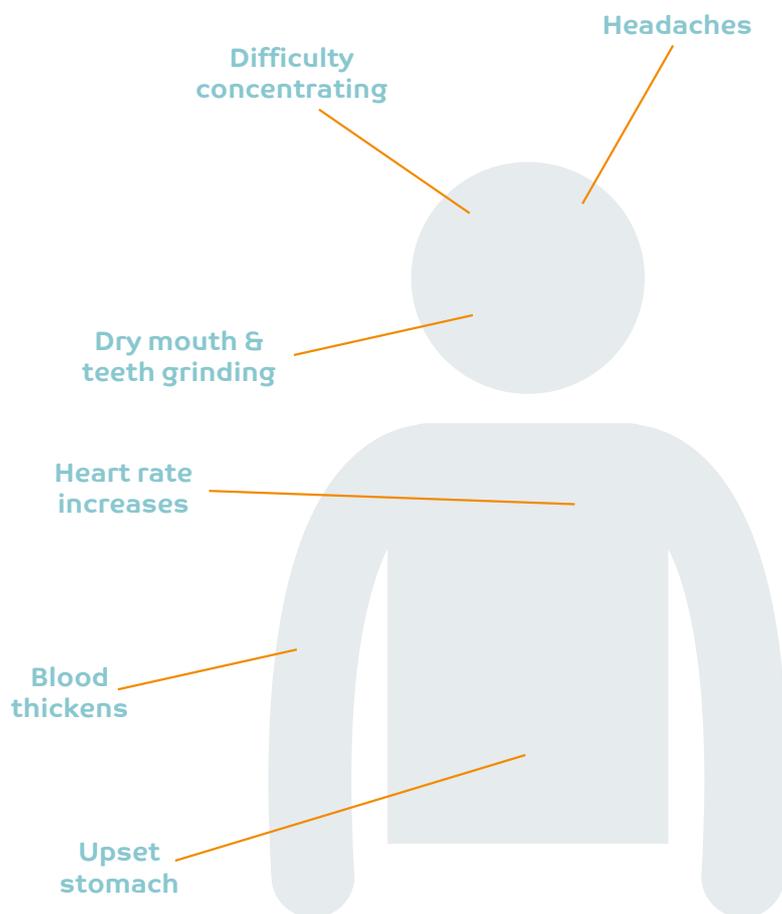
By taking steps to ensure our mind and body work in tandem, we give ourselves the best chance of feeling equipped to deal with life and work.

Red flags

These signs may show that your stress levels are rising and it's time to take action.

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Worrying more than usual
- Forgetting things
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unable to make decisions
- Quick to anger
- Difficulty sleeping
- Using alcohol or cigarettes more to cope

The physical impact of stress



When we're under too much pressure and feeling stressed, we experience certain sensations and symptoms.

Known as fight or flight syndrome, our bodies treat the situation like we're in immediate danger.

They produce a cocktail of what are known as 'stress' hormones – cortisol and adrenaline – to try and help us manage the situation.

As a result, the body shuts down non-priority systems, such as digestion and reproduction, whilst we deal with the threat.

Other processes are dialled up: your heart beats faster to get oxygen to major muscles; your blood thickens to better protect you if you're injured.

Whilst these impacts won't harm us for a short period of time, if we're often stressed and our bodies are constantly releasing these stress hormones it can make us physically ill.

Coping with pressure and stress

When you're busy at work and worrying about loved ones at home, it can be easy to get overwhelmed and feel out of control.

By thinking ahead, anticipating pressure and putting in place coping strategies, you can help make sure that pressure doesn't turn into stress.

Here's a four-part plan to build your resilience and reduce stress.

1

Acknowledge

When you're really busy, it can be hard to find time to take stock.

Put aside half an hour to explore which worries or things you have to do are causing you the most stress at the moment.

Writing them down can be a good way to start looking at your worries more objectively, evaluating if there are any you can solve or put aside.

Doing this can also highlight just how much you're trying to cope with showing just how important it is to be kind to yourself at the moment and make time to look after you.

2

Anticipate

Using the list of stress-causing worries you've made, have a look to see if there are any patterns - do certain situations or tasks always make you feel stressed? Are there times of the day when stress really builds?

Identifying these risk factors can help you put a plan in place to mitigate them next time they arise.

3

Plan

With the insight you have into stressful situations and times, make a plan of how you can deal with that situation next time it arises.

There might be something you can do to make it less stressful or, if it can't be avoided, it might be a case of building in recovery time afterwards to bring you back to your comfort zone.

Exercise:

What are the things you find relaxing?

When could you make more time for these?

4

Protect

Knowing that you're in a high-pressure, high-stress situation, give some thought to activities that help you relax and how you can proactively build more of those into your schedule.

Take a look at page 20 for ideas on relaxation activities.

Controlling worry



We all worry from time to time, but with the added health concerns of coronavirus, changes to our daily lives and the stress of still working we are all dealing with more stress and uncertainty.

Faced with such big changes and isolated from our support networks, it can be easy to fall into a spiral of worrying. But worrying all the time can make it even harder to cope with an already challenging situation, and it can take its toll on our physical and mental health.

What is worry?

Worrying is when we keep going over something in our mind feeling uneasy or concerned about it and not really coming to any solution.

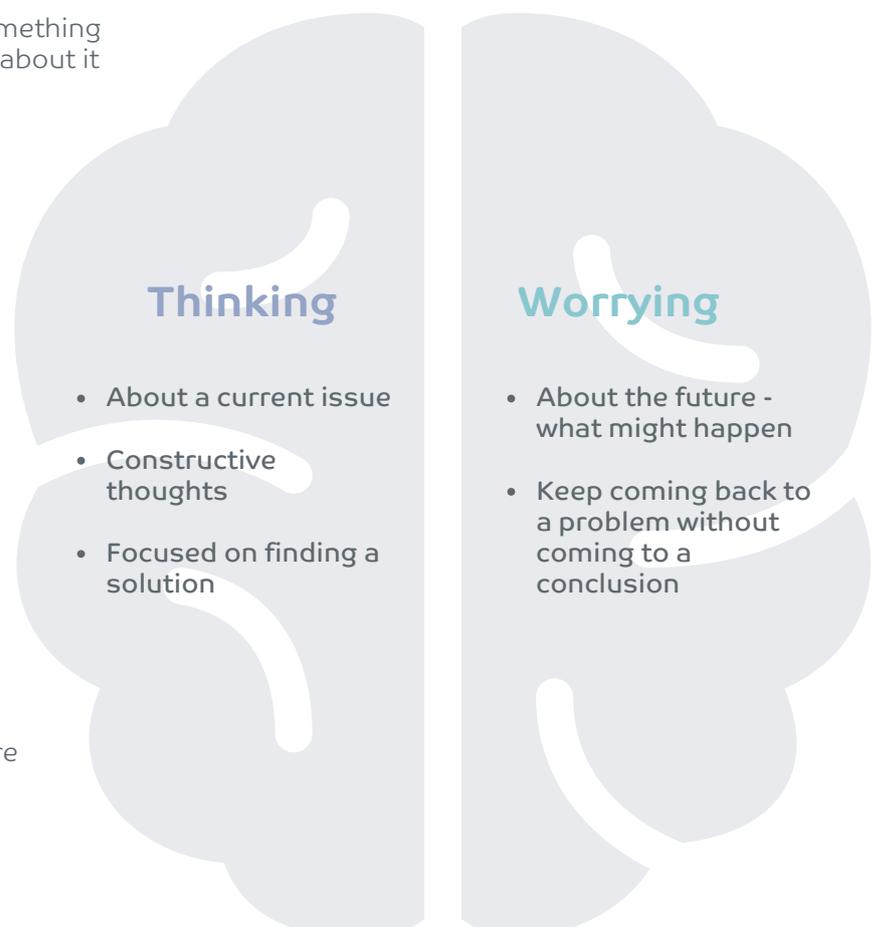
It's important to distinguish between worrying and thinking about something.

When we think about something, we're problem solving. Our thoughts are constructive, centred around managing the present situation and moving forward.

Worrying tends to be focused on the future, focused on what might happen. Rather than being solution focused, you tend to keep thinking about a problem without coming to any conclusions or solutions.

Worrying from time to time is common, but at the moment when our routines are disturbed, our support networks are far away and health risks are rampant, it's easy for worry to get out of control.

The first step to controlling worry is recognising it and labelling it.



Types of worry

Though what you worry about may be unique to you, the ways in which we worry are often similar.

These different ways of worrying are known as ‘cognitive distortions’. Below are some examples of common worry patterns or cognitive distortions.

Take a look through the list and see if you can pinpoint which worry patterns you fall into most often.

“I should”, “I must”

With this negative thought pattern, people tend to find themselves constantly falling short of their own expectations - however realistic or unrealistic they may be: “I must go to the gym more”, “I should be doing that kind of thing with the kids”. This style of thinking can lead to a lot of guilt and unhappiness.

Black and white thinking

It’s rare that a situation is completely bad or completely good or that there’s only one right solution to a problem. Black and white thinking can cause you to miss the nuance of a situation, only seeing it in terms of extremes rather than being able to neutrally evaluate all the possible solutions.

Emotional reasoning

We create our thoughts and emotions - they’re not facts. When we use emotional reasoning, we’re interpreting a situation based on how we feel at that given moment. For example, if you feel nervous, you may interpret the situation as dangerous and one to escape from, even if that’s not necessarily the case.

Mental filtering

Our brains are anything but impartial. Whether it's being more likely to see negative things, selectively picking out information that suits our own perspective or even liking an idea more because it's our own, we see the world in a biased way.

With mental filtering, we often ignore the positive things or flip side to an argument in favour of information that confirms how we already feel or what we believe.

This in turn then creates a body of evidence that convinces us we're right to think that way.

Catastrophising

When we take a situation and immediately jump to the worst case scenario, we're catastrophising.

This worry style often means we end up spending our energy thinking about unlikely, extreme scenarios and allowing our worry to grow and grow.

If catastrophising becomes a habit, it can lead to being in a constant state of worry about everyday situations.

Overgeneralisation

Sometimes our past experiences or perceptions have a big impact on how we think about our current situation.

Overgeneralisation is when we use one small experience or piece of evidence to make a broad assumption.

For example, you made a small mistake the last time you were doing a presentation at work and you say to yourself "I'll do a terrible job again this time, I'm awful at presenting, maybe I shouldn't be doing a job where there's any presenting, I should leave".

Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.

Corrie ten Boom

Techniques to control worry

There are many different techniques that can be used to help us control worrying.

Just as worries are different person by person, the best way to control them will vary too.

Don't get disheartened if you try one of these and it doesn't work - try another one on the list instead until you find one that works for you.

Recognise and label the worry

Just recognising that you've started to worry can help you take a step back and prevent that worry from escalating. Analysing the worry and seeing if it fits one of the unhelpful thinking styles on pages 10 and 11 can also help you to keep control by analysing the worry in a more detached way; it can also help you get to know your common worry patterns and catch the situation even earlier next time.

Write it out

Sometimes worries go round and round in our head because we don't take the time to reflect on them and acknowledge them. Writing out your thoughts can be a good way to unpick the different aspects of your worry and maybe uncover parts of it you didn't recognise before, helping you to address these and move on.

Schedule worry time

If you find yourself constantly worrying throughout the day, it can really take its toll and distract you from other day-to-day activities. Rather than allowing worry to take over your day, put aside 20 minutes in the afternoon or early evening to acknowledge and concentrate on your concerns. Over time, this helps you break the habit of constant worrying and gives you more opportunities to enjoy life.

Meditation

Rather than interacting with your worries and going over them, meditation is about observing what's in your mind at a given moment without trying to change it. It's a great way to practise detaching yourself from worry and being in the present moment rather than being controlled by 'what if'.

Exercise

Exercise helps to control worry in two ways. It acts as a distraction - it's hard to worry whilst physically exerting yourself and trying to follow an online class. After you've finished the body also releases feel-good endorphins that help boost your mood.

Limit online time

Staying up to date with the latest news and advice is important, but when we're at home it's easy to slip into spending a lot of time on our phones checking the latest stories or scrolling through social media. Use the screen time limit settings on your phone or download a screen time app to keep an eye on how much time you're spending online on your phone.

Mood hacks

You'll find many lists online with suggestions of things you can do to relax and de-stress. But just as stress is highly personal, so are the things that boost our mood. Start a list of 'mood hacks' - your personal list of the things that make you smile and boost your mood. When you start to feel worry creeping in, take a look at your list of mood hacks and pick the one that can help you switch off the worry in that moment.

Decide if the worry is hypothetical

Some worries are grounded in real-life challenges that we're facing and need to address; others are hypothetical - 'what if' worries. When you find yourself worrying, take a moment to think about whether it's hypothetical or not. If it's something that can be addressed, grab some paper and a pen and start focusing on solutions to help move you from worrying to problem solving. If it's hypothetical, try some of the other techniques on this list to challenge the thought and move on.

Switching off



When work is busy and you're feeling under pressure, it can be hard to switch off at home and get some much needed rest.

One piece of research found that 76% of us are unable to immediately switch off from work, with it taking an average of 1 hour and 39 minutes to relax after leaving work.

But with all the uncertainty around coronavirus, how can you avoid bringing workplace pressure home with you?

Process the day

It can be really hard to let go of something and put it behind you if you haven't had enough time to acknowledge it and take some time to reflect on it.

At the end of your work shift, put aside a small amount of time to process what happened that day.

How you do this will vary from person to person; some people may write about something that's upset them or made them angry, others may talk to a friend or partner.

For some people, writing their to-do list for the next day can stop thoughts about work running round their head.

Exercise:

What techniques could you use to help process the day?

What would be the best time of day to do this?

Create a routine

From limits on how often we can go out to seeing friends and family, many aspects of our normal routines have changed since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Faced with all this change, it can be easy for the boundaries between work and home to become blurred and for our stress levels to rise.

To help you make time for self-care, think about creating some 'book ends' for your day - morning and evening routines to help you reduce stress.

These routine 'book ends' could include practical things, such as preparing your lunch for the next day, as well as activities that help you unwind and de-stress.

Signals such as taking a shower or changing your clothes when you get home from work can help reinforce that the work day is over.

Creating a routine and sticking to it will help signal to your body and mind that it's time to relax, making it easier to switch off.

Take a look at page 20 for other ideas on relaxing activities to include in your routine.

Switching off routine template

Your switching off routine should be a combination of the tasks you need to get done and things you'd like to do and that help you relax. Use the template below to think about what the different aspects of your routine could be.

Things I have to do before work:

Things I have to do after work:

Things I find relaxing are...

I'd like to make more time to...

The best time of day to do this would be...

Sleep & recovery



We spend a huge proportion of our lives sleeping. It's not time wasted - it's essential to helping our brain and body perform at their best.

We've all heard the guidelines about getting 8 hours of sleep a night, but a significant percentage of UK adults don't manage that. With the added stress of worrying about loved ones or job security due to coronavirus, it can be even harder to get a good night's rest.

But sleep is absolutely essential to our wellbeing - both physical and mental.

Though we can boost our energy levels with breaks during the day, it's at night when our bodies really get the chance to repair and restore.

What happens when we sleep?

There are two types of sleep: non-REM and REM. Each type includes different stages, forming the sleep cycle.

The first stages you experience when sleeping are 'Non-REM'. During this type of sleep, there is no movement and the muscles are relaxed. The body uses this time to repair and rejuvenate itself.

REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is the final stage of the sleep cycle and is when the brain actively re-organises itself.

During this stage, the body and muscles are paralysed, but the brain is awake and your eyes continue to move quickly behind your eyelids.

It's impossible to regulate the time spent within each stage, but giving yourself enough time to sleep will allow the body to find its rhythm and get the right amount of each stage.

The different stages of sleep

Stage 1: When you're starting to drift off, you may hear things around you and have a sense of awareness, but your heart rate slows down as your body prepares to sleep.

Stage 2: Described as 'lighter sleep', you have now fallen asleep but could easily be woken or disturbed. The brain takes this time to repair and process memories.

Stage 3: The final stage of Non-REM is when you fall into a deeper sleep where muscles are relaxed and recovery can take place.

Stage 4: This stage is when your heart rate increases and you experience REM sleep. The most active point of dreaming, this stage is important for the brain as sorts through memories and emotions.

Sleep hacks

Knowing that sleep is so important but being aware you're not getting enough can create even more stress, making it harder to fall asleep and creating a vicious cycle.

Here are our top tips for cultivating the right habits to get the rest you need.

During the day

The foundations for a good night's sleep are laid during the day.

Staying active and getting enough exercise is a great way to make sure you feel tired at the end of the day and ready to head to bed.

It's also important to watch your caffeine intake. Caffeine's half-life is about 5 hours.

That means if you had a cup of coffee at 4pm, half of the caffeine would still be in your system at 9pm.

Try to limit caffeine intake to the morning and early afternoon to avoid it disturbing your sleep.

If you struggle to fall asleep because of worrying, try and set aside time to acknowledge and reflect on those worries before the end of the day to avoid them going round your head as you're trying to go to sleep.

During the evening

After the working day, it's essential to find ways to switch off and relax.

What this looks like will be different for everyone, but having enough time to process the day, put aside the stresses and do something you enjoy will help you unwind ready for bed. Take a look at pages 14 and 15 for tips on how to switch off.

Whilst drinking in moderation is ok, keep in mind that alcohol significantly effects sleep quality, keeping us in the lighter stages of sleep rather than the much-needed deep sleep phase.

If you're having an alcoholic drink, early evening is better to minimise the impact on sleep quality.

Getting ready for bed

We're creatures of habit: one of the best ways to get more sleep is to create a routine around a fixed bedtime and wake-up time.

As it gets nearer to bedtime, start to fade down artificial lighting, moving from a bright overhead light to a softer lamp.

Avoid watching TV or using other screens, including your phone, for at least an hour before bedtime: the blue light these devices emit can tell our brains it's time to wake up, not sleep.

Resources and inspiration

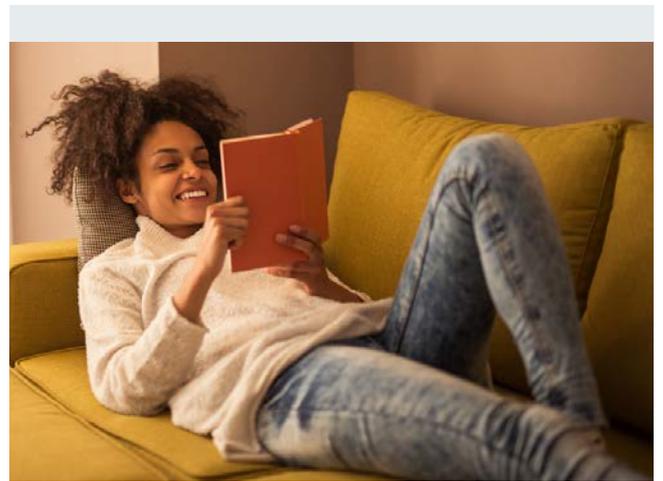


Throughout this support pack we've looked at understanding pressure, stress and worry as well as techniques for managing them.

In this final section, we've included practical guides and links to activities to help you implement some of the tips and techniques.

From relaxing breathing and ideas on how to unwind to quick energising workouts to wake up body and mind, there's something for everyone.

The final section also includes links to further mental health support. Remember: If you're struggling, reach out to family, friends or your GP for additional support.



In this section

- Relaxing breathing techniques
- Relaxation inspiration
- 5-minute workouts
- Further support - mental health

Relaxing breathing techniques

A simple way we can help to control our stress response is through being aware of and controlling our breathing.

Proper breathing physically helps us to relax and calm down and prevents anxiety-associated hyperventilation.

Calming breathing

- Position yourself in a quiet environment
- Make sure the air temperature is comfortable
- Sit comfortably in a chair or in a relaxed position
- Drop your shoulders naturally, so that your lungs can fully expand
- Gently lift your head and fix your eyes straight ahead of you; don't strain
- Take five slow, steady breaths
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Begin 'Calming Breathing' by breathing in easily and gently to the count of three, holding for a second, then breathing out to the same count of three

Diaphragmatic breathing

- Lie on the floor placing a small pillow under your head and another under your knees (this is optional)
- Place your hands flat across your stomach, with just the tips of your fingers touching
- 'Bell' out your stomach as you breathe in, filling the lower part of your lungs with air (your fingers should move apart) and count to three
- As you breathe out to the count of three, flatten your stomach muscles (your fingers will be drawn together again)



Free mindful breathing and belly breathing tracks to guide you through simple yet effective breathing techniques are available at stresscontrolaudio.com

Relaxation inspiration

When we're working hard and under a lot of pressure, it's important to take time to relax and unwind at the end of a shift and at the end of the day.

Everyone will have a different idea of the kind of thing they find relaxing, but we've pulled together a few ideas to get you started.

Use these as inspiration to think about the things you find most relaxing and use the template on page 15 to create a routine with plenty of recovery time.

Signals

Signals are actions that you do at a similar time each day that help flag to your mind and body that it's time to switch off. Here are just a few ideas for signals you could include in your routine.

- Change clothes
- Put on music
- Take a shower

Relaxation

Struggling to think of what helps you relax? Here are just a few of the common things people find helpful when trying to switch off.

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Read a book
- Calming breathing exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Have a bath

Activities

Planning something you look forward to or trying something new can be a great way to take your mind off a stressful day at work.

- Go for a walk
- Exercise
- Colouring in
- Phone a friend
- Walk to a new park
- Try a new recipe
- Plan something to look forward to
- Organise your photos
- Listen to a podcast
- Play a board game
- Do a Su Doku or crossword puzzle

Five-minute workouts

Exercise is a great way to beat stress, boost our mood and keep our bodies healthy, but finding time to fit in a home workout session after a long shift can be challenging.

There are two parts to getting active: the amount of time you spend exercising, but also the amount of sedentary time in your daily routine. Even if you're active during the day, sitting for more than an hour slows our metabolisms down, making us feel sluggish and sleepy. We've found and tested ten 5-minute workouts that are easy to build into your morning or evening routine or even for a quick burst of activity during the day.

All these workouts are on YouTube - click the workout title to go straight to the video.

Morning yoga

Make it really easy to start your day as you mean to go on with this relaxing 5-minute morning yoga routine.

600-step samba

Rack up your step count with this 600-step workout to cheesy classic copacabana.

No-weights arm toning

See if you can keep your arms up all the way through this four-minute toning challenge.

5-minute move with Joe Wicks

These quick workouts can be done as a family or on your own - they're tough for adults too!

Flat abs workout

Wake up your core by taking five minutes to really focus on your abs - this one is tough.

4-minute leg toning

Combine cardio with lots of leg-toning moves in this 5-minute, HIIT-style workout.

Quickfire HIIT

Tackle this challenging 5-minute HIIT routine with lots of dynamic movements.

Stress-busting cardio

Get rid of some stress with this quick cardio workout that centres on punches and kicks.

Mini yoga break

Take some time out to stretch and unwind with this super speedy 5-minute yoga practice.

5 min ab challenge

Challenge yourself with five back-to-back ab exercises for one minute each.

Further mental health support

Looking after your own mental health during a stressful time is essential to supporting your wellbeing.

As well as the information and tools in this support pack, there are many other sources of help and information to turn to if you need extra support.

Remember to reach out to your friends, family and GP if you're struggling - they're there to help.

Information

Rethink mental illness

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

This site has lots of useful information on mental health generally as well as content specifically around coronavirus and mental health.

Mental Health Foundation

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

From podcasts and videos to inspiring stories, there's lots of content on the Mental Health Foundation's website to support your wellbeing.

Anxiety UK

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

As well as a lot of useful information and tools to manage anxiety, this charity also has a specific section about anxiety and coronavirus.

Mind

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

From sharing personal mental health stories to information on the different types of psychiatric medicine, Mind is a wealth of information and advice about all mental health issues.

Get self help

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

Though not the fanciest website, there are many downloadable resources with exercises to help you understand and shape your mental health.

Apps

Cove

<http://www.cove-app.com/>

Finding the right words to express how you feel can be hard. Cove takes a different approach and helps you create music to reflect emotions. You can share your creations with people or store it in your personal journal.

Happify

<https://www.happify.com/>

Happify uses a mixture of different exercises and games to help you evaluate your mood and practise techniques to help you boost your wellbeing.

Chill Panda

<http://chillpanda.co.uk/>

Using your heart rate, Chill Panda suggests breathing exercises or light exercise to suit your mood and help you relax.

Headspace

<https://www.headspace.com/>

One of the best known meditation apps out there, Headspace is great for those who are new to meditation and want to learn more about it. The 10-day intro course is free, but after it's £9.99 a month or £49.99 if paid annually.

7 Cups

<https://www.7cups.com/>

Sometimes you just need to talk - and that's where 7 Cups might be helpful. It calls itself "the world's largest emotional support system" with trained volunteers ready to listen. Conversations are anonymous, confidential and the service is free.

