

MENTAL HEALTH IN TIMES OF CORONA

Due to the Coronavirus, change has been a major theme the past couple of weeks. The never ending flow of information and government measures are all uncertainties that can really affect your wellbeing. There is nothing strange about that, most of your life follows a rhythm with a certain degree of predictability. When this is disrupted, it forces you to be adaptable. Adaptability requires time, intention and resilience.

These recommendations can help you regain some grip on things. This way you can improve your mental health and resilience, or help you deal with fears, insecurities, stress or low mood. Accept the fact that you won't be back on track immediately, it will probably take more than a few days. Give yourself time to try out what helps. If you feel like you can't do it on your own, we will also recommend some resources where you can go to get help.

Take care of yourself

Routine

With the loss of your regular routine it is important to find new routine within these changed circumstances.

Do: reflect on previous daily activities that provided you with a routine, figure out which of those you can still do. How can you make these a part of your new routine? What will you need to change? Be creative! If something doesn't work, how can you make it work for you? For example: instead of cycling to university, go for a walk!

Do: try to stick to your regular times and schedule. Taking breaks, eating, sleeping and exercise, try to continue doing them at the times you normally would. Get up in the morning and follow a morning routine. Get dressed as if you are going to the VU. Be extra mindful during your cup of coffee and spend a little extra time on preparing your lunch. Don't forget to eat healthy!

Don't: drop everything and spend the days in your pyjama on the couch watching Netflix. Also: don't start using more alcohol or drugs, just because you don't have to be in school or work.

Balance: Work & Relax

Try to create a balance between work and relaxation. This shouldn't be new to you, hopefully you had found the happy medium already. It will require some adjustments. What does this new balance look like?

Do: make a list of the things you do for fun (things you might have even forgotten about). Music, writing your family or friends a postcard, reading a book, exercising, mindfulness, cuddling your pets. For example download a fitness app that will help you exercise in and around your home.

Do: continue to challenge yourself, keep your mind occupied. Write, journal or solve a puzzle.

Do: if possible, go outside. The current measures state that you can go outside, as long as you are not experiencing symptoms. Additionally it is important to keep 1.5m distance from others and wash your hands regularly.

Do: Keep your surroundings tidy. It is easier to relax and work in a space that is organised. At the same time, tidying up keeps you busy and gives you some exercise, it prevents you from being seated all day. Cleaning windows or mopping the floor can serve as a workout.

Don't: neglect your room or house.

Don't: take anything to extremes, really keep looking for that *balance*.

Social Relationships

Social relationships are important for us, it is naturally interwoven in our daily lives. You run into others spontaneously or you make plans to meet people. That has changed now, but in some ways it is still the same.

Do: keep in touch with friends, family, classmates. Make arrangements to do things together, each in your own home. Take breaks at the same time, text each other pictures. FaceTime is your friend, go on a walk 'together' while calling a friend or eat dinner 'together' over FaceTime. Find other ways to see your loved ones.

Don't: however badly you want it, you cannot organise or go to large social gatherings. We need to protect the vulnerable groups of people in our society at the moment, one of the ways to do this is social distancing.

Important: let people know how you are doing, especially when you are feeling down. Share your thoughts and feelings with others, you might be home alone, but you are not alone in this.

School/work

Routine

Do: make a time schedule with start- and end times; create a to-do list with your goals for the day or week; work in one or two hour slots; and make sure to take enough breaks in between.

Don't: set unrealistic goals. Don't expect yourself to be as productive as 'normal'. It will take a while for software, websites and resources to be in place. Calculate extra time for these inconveniences.

Separate Work- & Leisure or Relax - Place

Do: create a space where you can do coursework. Take breaks somewhere else, even if it is only a corner of a dining table..

Don't: work in bed or on the couch. These places are meant for relaxation. Working in your bed will make you associate your bed more with work rather than sleep, which in turn can lead to insomnia.

Roommates

Sharing a space? You're probably spending more time together than ever before. This can be fun, but it can also lead to frustrations.

Do: talk to each other. Make agreements and give each other space. Make sure you are able to take time for yourself, and vice versa. Maybe create separate workspaces for you and your roommates.

Dealing with stress or 'corona-fear'

Corona-fear?! The sheer amount of (negative) news items can be overwhelming. Constant updates are hard to ignore. This information can start to consume your thoughts, which can make you feel scared and depressed and cause you to worry more than you normally would.

Do: limit the times you check the news. Try not to follow the liveblogs and 24-hour newsfeeds. Turn off your social media, try to only gather corona-related information at set times. Processing all this information is exhausting and can unnecessarily scare you. E.g. Two times a day: in the morning and in the afternoon or evening.

Do: see things in perspective. Focus on things other than the coronavirus. Find things that make you laugh. Set achievable goals that will make you feel good when you finish them, such as trying out a new recipe, this will increase your feeling of control. Remind yourself why it is important you follow the RIVM guidelines. Compliment yourself regularly, for example: 'I am doing my part by staying in and maintaining social distance!'.

Do: if you are worried about your health, stay calm and objectively evaluate how you are doing. How do you feel today? How does this compare to yesterday?

Don't believe everything you come across about the virus on social media. And do not share information coming from sources you have not checked for reliability. Unfortunately there is a lot of unreliable information about the corona virus online.

Fears & Worries

Experiencing trouble concentrating due to recurring fears and worries? There are things you might be able to do.

Do: schedule a moment to write down your fears and worries. Or you could use some of the techniques mentioned [here](#).

Analyse the thoughts of worry and anxiety. Are they factually correct? Are there alternative ways to look at or think about the situation? Is it beneficial for me to think this way? If a family member or friend told me this, how would I react? Which of these fears can I influence at the moment? Is it helping me to worry about this?

Do: have there been instances in the past where you experienced similar feelings? What did you do then to deal with it? What worked? What didn't?

Do: a breathing- or relaxation exercise to calm your mind. You can use apps (like Headspace) or Youtube for guided breathing- or relaxation exercises.

Important: let people know how you are doing, especially when you are feeling down. Try to accept your emotions and let them be. Give yourself time to understand your thoughts and feelings and come to terms with them.

Need some extra help?

Feel like you could use some extra support with above-mentioned tips? These websites might help. Remember: you don't have to change everything at once, setting one small goal and achieving it is a great first step. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

- **Working and studying at home**
 - o <https://www.verywellmind.com/things-you-can-do-to-improve-your-mental-focus-4115389>
- **Self-care and routine**
 - o Improving daily routines: App – Daybook
 - o Sleep: App – Sleepio
 - o Monitoring your moods:
 - App – Moodgym
 - App – Happily
 - App – Moodkit
 - o Relaxation:
 - App – Headspace
 - App – Calm
- **Mental health:**
 - o Stress:
 - Website – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-manage-and-reduce-stress>
 - o Anxiety:
 - App – Dare
 - o Depression:
 - App – Moodfit