

MODULE 1: BEHAVIOURS: What Helpful Things Can I do To Feel Better During This Time:

In this section I show you that there are many things within your control. If you have completed a CBT model (5 Aspects) you may have noticed that you've withdrawn more, stopped certain activities, stopped exercising, started to comfort eat, stayed up later, drunk more coffee. At times of stress we often do things that make us feel **better in the short term** and **worse in the long term**.

These are all the things **YOU CAN DO** something about to feel better straight away:

- **Create a new routine, add structure and meaningful activities into the day,**
- **Improve your sleep,**
- **Exercise once a day to boost your immune system and to improve your mental health,**
- **Connect with others,**
- **Find a way to help or volunteer,**
- **Don't over check for signs of illness in yourself and others,**
- **Strike a balance with screen time,**
- **Don't over check the news and social media. Stay Informed but limit checking,**
- **Look after your skin and don't over wash your hands,**
- **Eat healthily for good physical and mental health,**
- **Complete a daily gratitude or positive qualities log.**



a.) Create a New Routine

‘Try to establish a new routine – if you are self-isolating or not able to work at the moment, try to establish a new routine as we know this is crucially important to our wellbeing. This might involve times to exercise and be in contact with others and relaxation time.’

Activity Diary-

I would recommend that you complete an activity diary for one week so you can look objectively at your current routine at the end of the week. This diary encourages you to write down briefly what you do every two hours, you need to rate your mood as this will help you to see mood patterns throughout the day/ week and look at how different activities make you feel. This diary also gives you an ACE score and I encourage you to rate the sense of achievement, closeness to others and enjoyment (ACE) you felt whilst engaging in each activity. I frequently use this tool at the start of therapy with clients and it gives a useful snap shot of what's happening for the person. It's a fantastic self-monitoring tool.

SELF HELP <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ActivityDiary.pdf>

Theory suggests that if our ACE scores are consistently low, we are vulnerable to developing depression and anxiety. See what you score across the week and think about what you may need to improve.

Once you have completed the activity diary and used it to monitor activity for a week you can then create a planner, you can use the same sheet or a wall calendar and I strongly recommend planning in activities for the week ahead and writing it into a schedule every week. This will keep you focused, give purpose, improve motivation and give you things to look forward to.

Activity top tips during COVID:

- If you are working from home make time for adequate breaks at lunch and log off on time, set an alarm as a reminder if needed.
- Complete boring chores at the start of the day and schedule an enjoyable activity in during the afternoon, this will help to keep you motivated.
- Commit to learning or trying something new during lock down.
- Write a to do list of chores and jobs you need to do around the house. You can add these to your activity planner.
- Make time for one pleasurable activity every day to help keep your mood positive, this could be a hot bath, exercise, relaxation.
- Adapt your activities – if in the past you have been able to enjoy meals out and going to events like the cinema then try to think how you can recreate these experiences; cook your favourite meal from scratch or listen to a classical concert on the radio, for example.
- If you are unsure where to start think of something you used to enjoy and pick that up again or think about your values and what is meaningful to you in your life; is it being helpful, being creative, being honest, being productive, being practical? If staying fit is important to you and you normally go to an exercise class twice a week and this is currently cancelled – think about what else you can do to stay in tune with your value of staying fit.
- Try to walk or exercise once a day.

If you need some inspiration here is a list of pleasurable activities, some of the outdoor things you will need to save for later but this list has lots of indoor activity ideas which you can try scheduling into your week: <https://sites.google.com/site/cognitivetherapycenterofli/self-help-materials/pleasurable-activities>



b.) Improve Sleep- Sleep Hygiene

Sleep helps to stabilise our moods and strengthens our immune system. However, it is likely that under the circumstances when there is possible money stress, health concerns, changes in routine that you may be experiencing more sleep disturbances than usual.

Most adults need 7-9 around hours sleep. Very few adults need more than 9 hours sleep and those who under (less than 6 hours per night) or over sleep often have an increased risk of obesity, headache, back pain and heart disease. So, although you may have extra time and those extra hours may feel enjoyable, too much sleep long term can negatively harm your health and disrupt your sleep routine.

If you are using sleep to avoid difficult feelings you may also emotionally feel worse long term as you feel less productive, achieve less and you will have less opportunities to connect with others.

If your sleep has been affected recently, here are some useful sleep hygiene tips to help you fall or stay asleep:

- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine close to bedtime.
- Limit daytime naps to 30 minutes (before 4pm). Only nap if you really need to.
- As little as 10 minutes daily activity makes a difference to night time sleep quality. Some people find it more helpful to exercise in the mornings as night time exercise can make it harder to fall asleep.
- Avoid foods that can be disruptive right before sleep such as fatty or fried meats, spicy foods, citrus fruits, heavy or rich foods and carbonated drinks.
- Exposure to sunlight during the day and the dark at night time can help to maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Make sure your sleep environment is comfortable. Consider the temperature of the room, cool rooms are best. Consider using black out curtains, ear plugs, a white noise machine and fans to make the room more relaxing.
- Schedule in wind down time-write a to do list before bed to organise your thoughts, have a hot bath or try relaxation techniques.

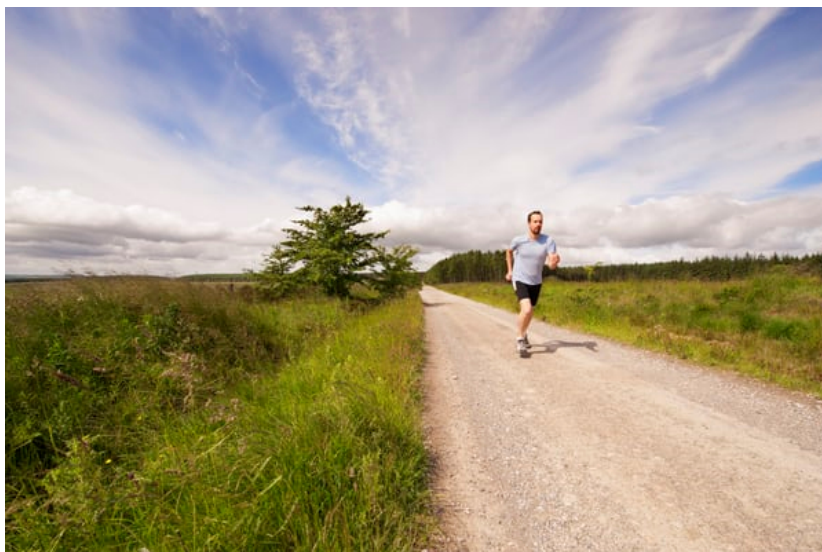
- Read a book or listen to music to distract an active mind.
- Only go to your bed if you feel sleepy.
- Use your bed only for sleep and sex, so you can associate your bed with rest and relaxation not high activity such as working on the computer or watching tv.
- Turn off electrical devices 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Reduce your fluid intake before bed.
- Avoid clock watching as this can cause you to feel anxious if you are struggling to settle. It may help not to look at the time throughout the night and put your clock on the other side of the room if necessary.
- If you are laying awake in bed for more than around 30 minutes, get up out of bed, go to a different room and do a boring and repetitive activity such as ironing before returning to your bed.
- A warm milky drink has been shown to improve sleep as it contains tryptophan which can help the body produce melatonin, which is responsible for a person's sleep-wake cycle.
- Camomile, ginger and peppermint tea are also calming drink choices before bedtime.
- Fruits containing melatonin can help you to fall asleep faster. Try cherries, bananas, pineapple and oranges.

If you would like further help with sleep CALM is a fantastic meditation, sleep and relaxation app which is popular with many businesses.

The NHS also recommend sleepstation.org.uk which has a useful range of articles and resources designed to help people sleep.

SELF HELP If you would like to look at your sleep in more detail and understand what factors can affect your sleep. Completing a sleep diary like this one could be really helpful:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/SleepDiary.pdf>



c.) Exercise Daily:

It is important that we try and get as much fresh air as we can at the moment. Whether it's getting out daily for a walk outside, sitting in the garden or having the windows open, fresh air is so important. If you are self-isolating try and move around different rooms in the house as much as you can.

Exercise as I'm sure you already know is very good for our physical and mental wellbeing. If the COVID situation is making you feel low, try and walk/ exercise outside early in the morning as exercise gives you those feel good endorphins and raises serotonin levels. Low serotonin causes depression and an antidepressant's role is to boost serotonin levels in the brain. If you can exercise regularly you will really improve your mood and help your brain to make natural serotonin over time. I often say to depressed clients view exercise as the same as your antidepressant prescription, try and take a little exercise every day alongside your medication.

If the sun is shining try and absorb this earlier on in the day, as sunshine boosts vitamin D which is thought to have an important role in regulating mood and warding off depression.

If the COVID situation is making you stressed and anxious, exercise, especially cardio like running helps you to burn off or prevent the build-up of adrenaline, one of our bodies stress hormones. Regular high intensity exercise is one of the most important things we can do to help keep anxiety symptoms at bay.

If you are feeling anxious about leaving the house currently or are currently self-isolating do try and find new ways to exercise inside. There are numerous online videos, exercise routines on youtube and maybe you have an old fitness DVD lying around indoors. If you have young children and have a Wii fit system this could be useful for keeping the family moving.

If you have free weights or a kettlebell pick a time in the day to complete a few sets of arm exercises or kettlebell swings if these are medically safe for you to do. Yoga is a great form of exercise if you want to stay supple as well as de stress and there are several free apps and videos which you could use to guide you through the poses.



d.) Connect with Others-even when physically isolated

'Stay connected – even if you are in self – isolation it is possible to stay connected to others by writing, phoning or messaging others. You could suggest to your workplace or family / friends group

that you have a set time each day to say “hello” and chat with each other, a bit like you might do at lunchtime at work.’

- Make it a priority to stay in touch with family and friends. Schedule in regular phone chats or Skype/ Zoom dates and put these dates in your activity diary.
- Try and keep coronavirus talk to a minimum during conversations with friends. It is important to take a break from all the stress, to share each other’s company and focus on other things going on.
- Social media can be a useful tool and great way to connect with family and friends. If necessary, temporarily unfollow people who share unhelpful updates.

When you feel close to others you are less likely to feel depressed and anxious. Making sure you find ways for you and your children to be connected to others regularly will make a difference and help you all to cope better with the current situation. It can really help to talk to others about how you are feeling and don’t be afraid to reach out and ask for help.

If you are not sure who you feel closest too or want to see how different and new activities effect your ACE score (sense of achievement, closeness to others and enjoyment) an ACE log is a really useful tool:

SELF HELP [https:// www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ACELog.pdf](https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ACELog.pdf)



e.) Find a Way to Help Others.

During times of crisis you may find it helpful to focus more on helping others. Is there anything you could do to help others right now? Could you write your phone number on a slip and post it to a vulnerable neighbour? Could you help a friend with their food shop if they’re self-isolating? Could you volunteer and help the community/ NHS if you have the time?

Another nice idea is to send someone you care about a message of encouragement or a positive affirmation. Check in with friends and help them feel supported if you feel able to help others with their emotional wellbeing.

Those who focus on others during times of need and focus on supporting the wider community in times of crisis tend to feel happier and healthier than those who are more self-focused. Doing kind and helpful acts can help you to feel positive about yourself and gives your life meaning and purpose.



f.) Reduce Symptom Checking.

If you are focused on checking for symptoms (For example checking your temperature several times a day) then try to reduce this. Complete a tally chart to see how often checking behaviour occurs and then set goals for yourself to gradually reduce your checking behaviour.

Checking helps you to feel less anxious in the short term but makes anxiety worse in the long term.

If you are concerned that you might have symptoms of the coronavirus use the NHS website for further information.



g.) Limit Screen Time

‘Strike a balance with screen times – it is possible that we might all be looking at our screens a bit more at the moment, whether that is keeping in touch with family or friends, because we are

working from home and less likely to move around or because we might be watching more tv – bear in mind that screens can affect our eyes and our ability to sleep. Try to balance screen time with reading a book, playing a game, training your pets!’



h.) Stay informed but don't over check the news.

‘If you are checking the news / social media streams or receiving notifications during the day – reduce this and turn off notifications. It is a good idea to keep up to date with the latest advice by checking a trustworthy news source once or twice a day. This is to ensure that you are reading facts and not any false information.’

If you are researching the illness too much try and limit this along with focusing too much on the news. It helps to understand the condition, what the symptoms are and when to ask for help. However, if you are spending a lot of time reading about COVID-19, make a note of how much time you are spending reading about it and set some goals to reduce this.

Step away from the media if you start feeling overwhelmed. As well as reducing checks chose a particular time of the day to check the news and set a limit, for example 7pm each evening for 20 minutes.

If you are feeling particularly anxious about updates but want to stay up to date, ask someone reliable to share major updates with you so that you don't avoid media entirely.

Be aware of misinformation as well as sensationalised headlines and coverage. Stick to a few trusted and reliable sources.

Remember staying informed is useful, over checking is very unhelpful.



i.) **Don't Over Wash Your Hands or Over Clean if You Are at Home.**

It is important that you keep the home clean and wash your hands when entering and leaving new places, however over washing your hands could be unhelpful. If you over wash your hands, they could become dry and damaged and if the skin cracks this could make you more vulnerable to infection.

Nurses state that cold or warm water is just as effective at hot water and kinder on skin. If your hands are sore blot dry hands instead of rubbing hands dry. Moisturise your hands with a non-perfumed moisturiser if they are starting to get sore.

Only handwash in line with government guidelines. If you are washing your hands frequently and above the recommended 20 seconds, this is excessive and may be counterproductive. Only use alcohol gel when you are not able to wash your hands. You do not need to apply hand gel straight after washing your hands.

You are able to reduce your own personal risk significantly, simply by:

- Washing your hands frequently for 20 seconds with soap and water.
- By avoiding touching your face (especially nose, mouth and eyes).
- Staying home as much as you can, even if you feel well.
- Keep 6 ft away from others when doing essential shopping or exercise.



j.) **Eat Well.**

‘Be aware of what you eat and drink as they can affect your moods – when we are stressed, anxious and down we can turn to eating more junk food, drinking alcohol, smoking more, consuming coffee... try to reduce these stimulants if at all possible.’

Research suggests that what we eat and drink affects how we think, feel and behave. If you are interested in the link between nutrition and mental health and protective factors, this is a really useful paper:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/food-for-thought-mental-health-nutrition-briefing-march-2017.pdf>

Eating well will also strengthen your immune system of course and make you more likely to fight off COVID-19 and any other infections. It is particularly important right now to eat plenty of vegetables and increase your daily water intake.

k.) **Keep a Daily Gratitude Log or a Positive Qualities Log.**

It could be useful right now to focus on the small positives about your day and the positive qualities you have shown during this difficult time.



Gratitude Log:

It can help your frame of mind if you focus on all the things you have got and not the things you haven't got right now.

SELF HELP Get into the habit of writing down **three things that you are grateful for every day** at the end of each day. This will help you feel better before you settle down to sleep. This could be things like- a warm bed and clean sheets, a delicious dinner, a hot shower.

Positive Qualities Log.

If you're feeling anxious and not achieving or doing what you normally do you may be feeling negative and less positive about yourself. If this is the case as well as logging the positive things you do also state what positive qualities you must have in order to have completed those tasks. Maybe you are showing different qualities right now that you are not acknowledging such as being more brave, creative, patient, resilient and strong.

Write down the things **YOU DO achieve** and write what that means about you as a person. See how much better you feel at the end of the week. Even if you write a task or a quality several times that's ok, its noticing it and acknowledging it that makes the most difference.



Here's a link to a positive qualities log:

SELF HELP <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/PositivePersonalQualitiesDiary.pdf>

I.) Know the Facts

Understanding the signs and symptoms of the illness and how to treat yourself and others may help you feel prepared. Research what to do if you feel unwell and look at how the virus may affect children and adults differently. Use NHS 111 online if you feel concerned about a symptom you have or need some advice.

Remind yourself that although this illness does need to be taken seriously it is important to keep the threat in perspective. The UK's chief medical director Chris Witty estimates a mortality rate for

coronavirus of 1%, so whilst you may get unwell there is currently a 99% survival rate across all age groups. SARS had a mortality rate of more than 10 per cent.

You may find it helpful to look at official figures to balance out any thoughts which tell you that the risk of death or serious illness is far greater than it actually is. Remember anxiety makes it feel like bad things are more likely to happen and makes us also underestimate our ability to cope:

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-age-sex-demographics/>

