

A guide to getting through lockdown

As lockdowns continue in many countries around the world, many of us are finding our frustration and anxiety are peaking. Having spent several months looking forward to the end of 2020, for many of us 2021 feels no better, in fact, it might even feel worse.

There are things we can all do to protect our mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic. Try our Quick Read (if you are in a hurry) or Detailed Read (if you have more time) for more information.

Following the suggestions may help you feel more resilient, some won't be right for you. Just do what works for you and do not worry about everyone else – they're using their own coping mechanisms and going through their own experiences. That is how you will help to maintain your mental wellbeing during lockdown.

If you are struggling to cope, we highly recommend that you seek professional advice. Please do not suffer in silence.

Quick read

Got five minutes? Take these simple steps to help maintain good mental health during lockdown, or indeed at any time.

- **Accept the situation**
 - Acknowledge the challenges you are facing and accept that you can not yet resolve them.
- **Reflect on past experience**
 - Think about how you have worked through challenges in the past, what can you (and avoid doing) to help you overcome the current situation?
- **Find a routine**
 - Following a routine can make you feel productive, even when you may not feel that you are achieving as much as you normally would.
- **Find balance**
 - It is important to stay informed during the pandemic, but you do not want to add to your stress. Limit the amount of news you watch and read – try tuning in to just one news programme per day.
- **Take comfort**
 - Celebrate the little successes you achieve every day! Cooking your favourite meal, finishing a book you have been reading – take a minute to enjoy the small things.
- **Be kind**
 - Have the courage to take some time to do what is best for you. Meeting your own needs is just as important as helping those around you.
- **Recognise that you are doing enough**
 - Resist comparing yourself to others. As long as you and the people you care for are safe, fed and loved, you are getting it right.

Detailed read

Got a bit of time to spare and interested to know more? Read our detailed guide to maintaining good mental wellbeing.

Accept the situation

The first step towards getting through a challenging experience is to accept it. When things get difficult, we tend to resist or deny them, because it is natural to not want to be in pain. The problem here is that this resistance uses a huge amount of energy, leaving little with which to confront the problem. That said, acceptance does not necessarily mean being happy about where we are. You might feel sad, angry, even. And that is OK. You do not need to have it all worked out. What you do need is to acknowledge the situation at hand, so that you can take control and ask what you want the story of the next few months to be for you.

Reflect on past experience

You might very well be thinking that you can not cope with lockdown. Try not to think in these terms – you *can* cope. Depending on how your country has managed the pandemic, you have probably experienced lockdown in 2020. Prepare yourself for the weeks ahead by reflecting on those previous experiences. What helped you get through last time? What did not work for you? Allow yourself time for this process. Give yourself space, privacy and try to focus on what would genuinely help you, as an individual, instead of worrying about other people.

Get back into your routine

During lockdown, one of the most widely offered pieces of advice is to establish a routine. Something that gives you a sense of order when you can not leave the house. This need for structure will be just as essential in 2021, but for many of us, it is likely to have slipped over the holiday period. With the festive season over, and large numbers of people still in some form of lockdown, consider the new year an opportunity for something of a reset. Try to rediscover the routine that kept you going before, and you are bound to find lockdown a little easier.

Manage your exposure to information

One of the ways in which we try to take control of stressful situations is gathering data. The problem, however, with an area as broad and as intimidating as COVID-19, is that by plugging into the never-ending stream of news coverage and social media, we can easily become overwhelmed. Of course, it is important to be informed, but there is a balance to be found – admittedly a delicate one – between keeping yourself up to date and exposing yourself to so much that you risk stress and anxiety. Consider watching the news just once in the morning or evening, and then putting barriers in place for the rest of the day.

Take comfort from the little things

With the promise of a vaccine on the horizon, many of us are taking comfort in the knowledge that there is now an end in sight. While this is certainly no bad thing, it is not enough to take all of our joy from the bigger picture. After all, it is likely to be months – if not even another year – before we are all vaccinated. To maintain our mental wellbeing, we need also to focus on what little victories we can achieve daily. We need to be flexible, and take hope from the here and now, just as much as from the future.

Be kind to yourself

Self-compassion is incredibly important. Far too often, we see parents, carers and healthcare workers neglecting their own needs in order to prioritise others. While this is admirable, it is not sustainable to be kind to others long-term if you are not kind to yourself. This is not always easy; self-care can actually be incredibly courageous. It is about looking at your experience – your failures just as much as your successes – and asking what you can do next. It is about meeting your experience, whatever it might entail, with kindness.

If you are a parent

This is especially important for parents who are trying to oversee home-learning while also remotely holding down a full-time job. For many children, the novelty of not being in school has well and truly worn off, and they will be upset – possibly even angry – to suddenly be told that they're housebound again. Parents should not dismiss these concerns. Talk to your children about how they're feeling and keep them in a routine, but ultimately, recognise that you can only do so much. It will not go to plan every day. If, at the end of the day your children are warm, fed and loved, you are getting it right.