

Self-care through COVID-19

COVID-19 and the UK lockdown has been a [difficult time for us all](#). It can feel even harder for those who have a significant health condition, like Wolfram syndrome, which affects how you experience world. Lots of people with health conditions such as this might be even more concerned about [how they cope](#) with the next few months. It can [feel even harder when you are visually or hearing impaired](#).



We want you to know that this is affecting everybody in some way. None of us were able to prepare for this and so it's not helpful to expect ourselves to know how to cope with this.

We have put together a self-care guide to support you to help yourself during the pandemic. We hope to re-assure you that [what you are experiencing is understandable, expected and very common](#).

[It is not you that is unusual, it is the situation that is unusual.](#)

The Wellbeing Wheel

We can use the wheel below as a basis to think about taking care of our wellbeing. [How are you doing in each area?](#) If 10/10 was “perfect”, what would you score for each one? It's important to note that [we cannot aim to be 10s in all areas](#), as life doesn't work like that.



Whilst we can't be 10s in all areas, we can take small steps to [improve our score](#) by 1 or 2. Below is a list of ideas of these steps you could try to improve your score.

Removing toxins:

- Time away from social media/news
- Screen free time
- A little less caffeine
- Time away from stressful conversations

Move:

- Make a few more trips up the stairs
- Go for a walk
- Do a short online exercise class
- Try a new type of exercise

8 hours sleep opportunity:

- Winding down
- A relaxing bath
- Buy a new pillow
- only use bed for sleep
- Adjust your room temperature

Connect with others:

- Write a letter
- Talk about happy memories
- Send a voice-note
- Organise activities with your house
- Use NHS or charity befriending services

Eat real food:

- Try new fruits
- Try a new recipe
- Be creative and make up a meal with what's in the cupboard
- Make some healthy flapjacks

Be mindful:

- Be present when doing everyday tasks e.g. warmth of the water
- Use Headspace app
- Walk - listen & pay attention to your surroundings

Contribute to something:

- Join a Facebook group to support your community
- Volunteer if you can
- Donate to charities or foodbanks
- Buy a product that supports a charity

Self-compassion:

- Give yourself a bit more time
- Be understanding if things don't go to plan
- Make time to do something just because it makes you feel good

Anxiety & Fear

Anxiety and fear are **normal responses** to things we find stressful, threatening or worrying. For this reason, it's not uncommon to feel anxious during the pandemic. **We feel anxious because we believe we are in danger.** When we detect danger in the environment, adrenaline rushes into our bloodstream to get us ready to either fight or run away. Anxiety and fear responses exist to **protect us.** The **fight or flight** response is triggered when we feel a lot of anxiety or fear.

The fight or flight response happens whether the danger is real or not. It's all about whether we **perceive** the situation to be dangerous. People respond to the same stressful situation in different ways.

Fight or Flight

Fight or flight is hard wired into our systems. It is our **survival mechanism.** Many years ago, humans relied on this response to alert them to danger in the environment – for example, animals that might attack and kill them. At this time the danger was **very real** and it was important to be ready to either fight it, or run away, in order to survive.

Nowadays the anxiety response continues to be triggered when we perceive danger, though the danger might not be so serious and the **strong physical response** that follows might seem **out of proportion** to the situation.

Signs of Anxiety

We each have our own early warning signs of anxiety. We might notice **anxious thoughts** in our minds and **physical feelings** of anxiety in our bodies. This can feel really uncomfortable when we don't need to fight or run from any physical danger. For example:

- Racing heart
- Breathing quickens
- Feeling hot
- Sweating
- Tension in our muscles
- Blurring vision



Managing anxiety

- Use the anxious energy such as a short walk or game in the garden.
- Focus on your breathing, for example, how it feels to breathe in and out. Imagine breathing in one colour and out another colour.
- Visualise being in a pleasant, safe and comfortable environment (e.g. being on a beach).



Use this guide to help:

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

- Try some relaxation techniques - search mindfulness or relaxation on YouTube or use the Headspace App.
- Listen to your favourite music. Try to pick out all the different instruments and sounds that you can hear.
- Count backwards from 1000 in multiples, for example 7.
- Count things that you can see that begin with a particular letter. Or think about items beginning with "B", and move through the alphabet.
- Postpone your worry – sounds strange, but it helps! See the information sheet on how here: <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Worry-and-Rumination>



Getting back to “normal”

It might feel quite scary going back into the world after such a long time away. It can be a good idea to do this gradually, in small steps, so it feels more manageable and less daunting. By doing this, you can face each smaller fear using positive coping strategies, and remind yourself that you are in control of your anxiety. Each time you learn to tolerate a smaller piece, you are a step closer to facing the thing that scares you most.



Breaking it down...

Start by writing down the situation or thing that you are fearful of. Now think of ways you could start to gradually expose yourself to it, in smaller more manageable ways. You might want to consider...

- Entering the situation at a different, quieter time of day
- Watching a video or looking at a picture of the thing you fear.

- Entering the situation with a [trusted family member or friend](#)
- Entering the situation [with something](#) that helps you feel safe

Put these anxiety provoking situations into order depending on **how anxious they make you feel**, on a scale of 0-100 (%). This might take a few tries

Now it's time to try it! Start at a point which makes you **feel some anxiety**, to challenge yourself, but that feels **achievable**. You might want to **repeat the steps** until your anxiety reduces, before moving up to the next one.

Useful links

MIND www.mind.org.uk

National mental health charity with links to information, advice and support for a range of emotional difficulties:

No Panic <http://nopanic.org.uk>

Offers advice and support, focusing on self-help recovery and giving people the skills needed to manage emotional difficulties as they arise.

Anxiety UK www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Support for people who experience various types of anxiety including social anxiety and phobias.

Coping with coronavirus www.copingwithcoronavirus.co.uk

Self-help resources and links for coping with anxieties and low mood and general wellbeing.

For young people:

Young Minds <http://youngminds.org.uk>

Charity supporting and empowering young people to understand and successfully manage their mental health

Kooth <http://kooth.com>

Provider of online counselling and mental health resources for children and young people.

For adults:

IAPT

Each local area has an NHS service called 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' who offer support with mental health difficulties.

You can self-refer too. Find yours here: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/>



RNIB:

Counselling around sight loss. Offered over the phone or online:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-and-support-services/sight-loss-counselling-team>