

Life after lockdown: Managing new routines

Information for patients



It has been really strange getting used to the 'new normal' of staying inside, working from home, home schooling, even going to the shops has changed!

Whilst we had some very specific rules to follow things are now going to feel different. We will have a new set of rules to follow and things are changing again.

Humans are creatures of habit and when our habits are disturbed it can create anxiety and stress. Having a good routine can help you feel grounded, comforted and secure when things in the world are feeling a little unsure. Once you have a routine it will get easier every day to stick to your new plan. It might feel difficult getting started with a new routine, or back into your old routine but here are some top tips that might help.

Planning

When you are struggling with your routines for the day it can help to create a plan. Using an activity template, a diary, calendar or this template here. List the things that are important to you and what you need to get done for that day.

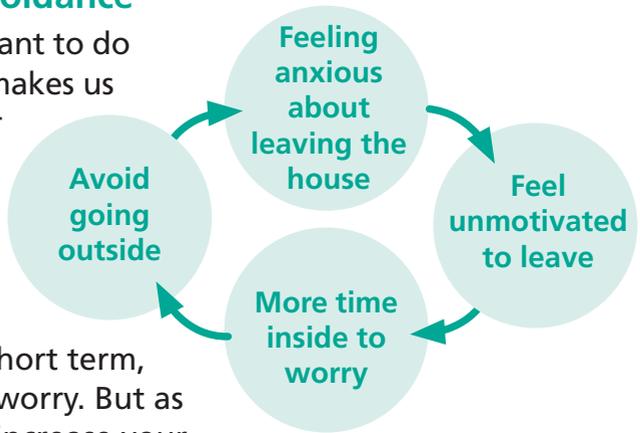
Using this schedule include:

- Work / College / University work
- House work / chores
- Food shopping
- Meal times
- Exercise
- Phone / video calls with friends and family
- Self-care / relaxation or anxiety strategies.



Watching out for avoidance

When we really don't want to do something, a task that makes us feel anxious, worried or scared, our brains will act in a way to help control this. One way is to avoid the situation that makes you feel uncomfortable. In the short term, this might reduce your worry. But as seen in this cycle it can increase your anxiety and lower your confidence in the long run.



Graded exposure

This is when you try out anxious situations a little bit at a time, in a planned and repeated way. You start with something that causes the least amount of worry. This gives you the chance to confront your anxieties about the task, your coping skills and for you to feel start to feel in control of your anxiety. This will boost your confidence and help you build up to more challenging things.

For example, if you haven't driven in a while try getting used to being in the car again and build up to practicing your commute.

Take it small steps at a time:

- Plan your first time going out - start with something small and manageable like walking around the block.
- Expect you might feel some anxiety.
- Remember your coping strategies.
- Stay in the situation till the anxiety passes.

- Repeat until you are comfortable.
- Look and celebrate your success.
- Don't be harsh on yourself , we all have ups and downs.

Self-care

It is very easy to make your new routine around other people's needs, but it is important to still include time for yourself. Think about an activity that is just for you.

It could be having a coffee in the morning before the whole house wakes up. Going for a walk on your own. Reading your book before bed. Whatever it is, make sure that it is time just for you. Take that time to have a break just for yourself.

Sleep cycle

It will be likely you may find that your sleeping pattern will change when we start to change our lives. Doing more exercise, commuting, socialising and general day to day activities will have a bigger impact on our energy levels than we might think so might we might feel more tired than before.



Sunlight also plays a big part in our sleep cycles. Our internal 'bodyclock' reacts to natural light and helps to keep it in balance. Getting out more and having more sunshine might change our sleep cycles. If you are struggling with sleep try regular exercise, avoid caffeine before bed and have a look at the resources at the end of this sheet about getting a good night's sleep.

De-clutter and keep

While you are planning your new routine have a think about everything you need to do in the day. And what things are you doing in the days that actually don't need doing?

See what can be reduced or if something isn't that helpful don't include it. This is a good time to 'de-clutter' and look at old patterns in your day that weren't helpful or productive.



Think about any new hobbies you've picked up throughout lockdown and include them. Bring these times you have enjoyed into your new routine. Have you started a new tradition with your family? Include anything you have picked up during lockdown that makes you happy.

What works best for you?

A common trap you might fall into when you plan a routine, is that you might promise yourselves things that just don't work for you. The future thought of going for a run at 6am might feel like a very healthy thing to do, but it isn't realistic for a lot of us!

Be honest and kind to yourself about what you can achieve and don't set grand tasks that only a superhero could manage.

If you prefer to exercise in the evening then plan it then. If you are a night owl, plan your work (if possible) for when you feel your brain works best. Don't be afraid to adapt things to work for you.

Reminders - It might help to set reminders for your new routine. Put a reminder for each task on your phone. Set alarms if you find it hard to start. Or use sticky notes to prompt yourself.



Worry time - If you are struggling with worries throughout the day it can help to set 'worry time' in your routine. Scheduling this into your day, if you are feeling overwhelmed, can help you go through any worries at a set time and not let it take over parts of your day.

Setting goals for ourselves that are SMART

Set goals that are:

- **Specific** - this means you have one clear mission like - "go to the supermarket by myself" (change for whatever new rules are).
- **Measurable** - set a certain time frame - "by the end of the week I would have liked to have gone outside x times."
- **Achievable** - don't push yourself too quickly. This is a time of adjustment and you shouldn't push yourselves into something that makes you feel too uncomfortable.
- **Relevant** - all your goals are going to be within the guidelines set, so for now don't make goals to go abroad (guidelines).
- **Timed** - this means your goal has a deadline for when you want to complete it.

Redefine success and be patient with yourself - Things are going to be different for a while. Don't be harsh on yourself if things don't instantly go back to normal.

It takes time for a new routine to become natural. Be proud of what you have achieved and your successes.

It can help to write down three positive things at the end of each day to look back on and see how well things have actually gone.

Control what you can control - While we are managing a new set of guidelines it can be frustrating if we see people are not following them. Focus on what you can control of your own behaviour and try not to dwell on the behaviour of others. Things are changing very quickly and people are making the best of a very new and confusing time, so it might not be perfect every day. We are so used to doing things a certain way and as we are learning our new routines people are also adapting too.

Remember:

- If people aren't following the rules in shops, it might be their first time going to the shops. They may not be familiar with all the new signs or layout.
- They aren't breaking the rules to harm me.
- We are all learning and getting used to the new ways together.

Finally:

- It is okay if the routine you have made shifts. We are always changing and if something works better for you then don't feel you can't tweak your plan.
- It does take time to get used to a new routine, and the change in your life. Be kind yourself if it feels difficult at first, it will get easier every day.

Resources

NHS Mindfulness Guide

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/

NHS Every Mind Matters Sleep Guide

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/sleep/

Sport England has a wide selection of online exercise platforms including working out with the kids, exercises for older adults and those with long term health conditions.

www.sportengland.org/jointhemovement#get_active_at_home

A guide to living with worries and anxious thoughts in this uncertain time www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty

Mindwell provides information on looking after your mental health and support www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/

Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service provides psychological therapies for common mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, for those aged 17 and over who are registered with a Leeds GP www.leedsmentalwellbeingservice.co.uk

Support

Samaritans - Telephone: **116 123** (free, anytime)

Crisis Text Line - Text SHOUT to **85258**

Silverline - Aimed at people over 55. Their helpline is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Telephone: **0800 470 8090**

CALM (for men) - Telephone **0800 58 58 58** 5pm- midnight daily

The Mix - Aimed at people under 25. Telephone **0808 808 4994** from 4pm and 11pm every day of the year.

They also run a crisis text service, text **THEMIX** to **85258**