

## UNITE MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE UNDER THE STRAIN OF A PANDEMIC

This is a trying time for Unite members and all the people of the UK, there will be worries about health, finances and coping with being on lockdown. There is such a change to people's normal routines at home, in work and in work at home.

There will be many missing contact with friends and family, and those at most vulnerable are being asked to stay at home for at least 12 weeks, this all might feel difficult or stressful.

- Feeling anxious or worried about coronavirus
- Stressed about having to stay at home only going out once a day for exercise and essentials such as food
- Unable to adapt or cope with working from home
- Worried about going to work because of becoming infected but you need the money
- Anxious because you or someone you live with has symptoms
- Stressed because self - isolating as an individual or a family/household
- Very worried about being isolated and claustrophobic because you are most vulnerable group, and staying at home for 12 weeks on NHS advice

There are many organisations out there that can help and lots of things you can try that could help your wellbeing.

### ARE YOU IN THE HIGHER RISK GROUP?

Health Authorities and government bodies are contacting people who they have identified as being at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. If this affects you or someone you know, there is specific guidance that you should follow, and extra support is available to help you:

Find details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

## STAYING AT HOME help with ISOLATION FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

### KEEP IN TOUCH

- Arrange phone calls or send instant messages or texts
- If you don't already, then use video media such as WhatsApp or Snapchat
- If you home from work try zoom conference its easier than you think just google zoom
- If you're worried that you might run out of stuff to talk about, make a plan with someone to watch a show or read a book separately.
- Jot down a few old memories you can re share with each other think of funny situations.

### CONNECT WITH OTHERS to PREVENT LONELINESS

- Think about things you can do to connect with people. For example, putting extra pictures up of the people you care about might be a nice reminder of the people in your life.
- Listen to a chatty radio station or podcast if your home feels too quiet.
- Speak with someone you trust, about being home or anxious about coronavirus
- You could join a peer support community
- If you're going online more than usual it's important to look after your online wellbeing.

### CHECK LIST for ESSENTIALS AND KEEPING BUSY AND ACTIVE

- **Food:** Arrange to get food and essentials, delivered by supermarket or friends/ family
- **Medication:** Do you have enough medication, or a way to get more?
- **Health:** Make arrangements or delay any planned therapy or treatments
- **Connectivity:** Check you have email addresses, phone numbers, arrange help to set up tech like a video calling apps if you're not sure. This is where youngsters can help
- **Routine:** Create a new routine for you or if lost are at home
- **Physical activity:** Exercise at home, like going up and down the stairs, Pilates or Yoga. Use a video or download a programme. If in a household learn to dance.
- **Getting fresh air:** If you are able to go out make use of your one a day exercise, if you have a garden make use of it, if in a flat open all the windows if warm enough. or
- **Bring the garden indoors:** Get some seeds delivered, start planting, grow indoor fruits or sweet peppers and chillies. Ask relatives to pick up a few plants.
- **Entertainment:** Order some books, videos, puzzles, games when was the last time you played snakes and ladders or Ludo?
- **Hobbies:** Start painting or drawing, write poetry, when were you going to start that novel? Now is the time.
- **Education:** Register for online courses, check out Unite's lifelong learning programme

HSE Guidance on home working can be found here:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

### CLAUSTROPHOBIA

- Open the windows to let in fresh air. Or you could spend time sitting on your doorstep, or in the garden if you have one.
- Try looking at the sky out of the window or from your doorstep. This can help to give you a sense of space.
- Regularly change the rooms you spend time in.

### ANXIETY

- If you have panic attacks it might help to plan a 'safe space' in your home that you'll go to.
- You can also find ways to comfort yourself if you're feeling anxious. For example, there are things that you can use to distract such as phone calls to a loved one, television, breathing exercises which may help. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) has more information on [how to cope if you're feeling anxious about coronavirus](#).

## **OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)**

Obsessions and compulsions can take over your life, and leave you feeling helpless. This is even more so if you have to change your routine, stay at home or are faced with additional hygiene such as washing hands.

However, there are some things you can try to help manage your OCD and improve your wellbeing. Remember that different things work for different people at different times. If something isn't working for you (or doesn't feel possible just now), you can try something else or come back to it another time. It is important you let family and friends know if you are struggling. Further information and help **here**: [obsessive compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#).

## **DIET IS IMPORTANT FOR AIDING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH**

Your appetite is sure to change if your routine changes, or if you're less active than you usually are. Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can help your mood and energy levels.

Drinking enough water is important for your mental and physical health. Changing your routine might affect when you drink or what fluids you drink. It is very important you take regular breaks especially when working from home and you are not used to it.

If you are self-isolating, you can ask someone to drop off essential food items for you. If they do this, ask them to leave food at your doorstep, to avoid face-to-face contact with each other.

You may find that supermarkets and online delivery services feel busier than usual at the moment. If you're feeling anxious about going to the supermarket or arranging an online delivery, it might help to try some of our [self-care tips for anxiety](#), such as breathing exercises.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The charity MIND has an especially dedicated web site around covid-19 and how to cope with mental health issues that are existing and made worse or created by the pandemic we all face. There are dedicated pages and help around staying at home, Anxiety, OCD and much more. Providing signposting towards appropriate organisations and help including an array of phone numbers to get help.

Advice from MIND **here** <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

## WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO)

The following principals were developed by the Mental Health Department at WHO as support for mental and psychological well-being during covid-19 outbreak.

### General population

1. Covid-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographical locations. Don't attach it to any ethnicity or nationality. Be empathetic to those who got affected, in and from any country, those with the disease have not done anything wrong.
2. Don't - refer to people with the disease as "covid-19 cases", "victims" "covid-19 families" or the "diseased". They are "people who have covid-19", "people who are being treated for covid-19", "people who are recovering from covid-19" and after recovering from covid-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones.
3. Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that cause you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts. Gather information at regular intervals, from WHO website and local health authorities' platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours.
4. Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the person receiving support as well as the helper.

WHO document **here** [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_2)

## NHS: 10 WAYS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

The coronavirus (covid-19) outbreak means that life is changing for all of us for a while. It may cause you to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored, lonely or frustrated. It's important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently. Remember, this situation is temporary and, for most of us, these difficult feelings will pass.

There are some simple things you can do to help you take care of your mental health and wellbeing during times of uncertainty. Doing so will help you think clearly, and make sure you are able to look after yourself and those you care about.

10 ways you can help improve your mental health and wellbeing if you are worried or anxious about the coronavirus outbreak find them **here**:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/>

Unite mental health booklet **here**: <https://resources.unitetheunion.org/media/1713/1713.pdf>