

## Looking after your Mental Health during the Coronavirus Outbreak



Firstly it is important to remember it is OK to feel whatever you are feeling. We all react differently in situations so it is important to look after your mental health as well as your physical health during this time.

You may have never experienced anxiety that has affected you before this virus outbreak and that is completely understandable. You may have noticed any existing mental health conditions that you already have become more difficult to manage and that is understandable too. Anxiety can even make physical symptoms more prominent, especially pain, even though nothing has actually deteriorated in your body and this might include pain in your amputated remaining limb or phantom limb.

Anxiety is fuelled by uncertainty and that is what we are all facing at the moment. However we can look back on other times in our life where there was uncertainty and reflect on how we managed through those times and see if we can find that resilience again. So in times of uncertainty it is helpful to find what is certain and try to only focus on the things we can control rather than what we cannot control.

You may find that time spent socially isolating can create mental space to think about any difficulties arising from your amputation or other aspects of your life and these can feel overwhelming.

Here are a few ideas that will help you deal with isolation and social distancing. There are some exercises that can help with any feelings of uncertainty. If you would like to go through this leaflet with someone, our counsellor will be happy to talk you through any of the exercises or information provided.

At the end of this document there are a list of organisations and websites that provide support. It is important to manage any difficult feelings and the best way to do that is to talk to someone. The counsellor within Dorset Prosthetic Centre is available to speak with you over the phone so if you would like her to contact you please call the department on 01202 704363.

**Limit the amount of time you spend reading or watching things on the news that increase your anxiety.** I suggest setting specific times – maybe just tuning into the government’s daily briefing and the subsequent news programme which helps process what has been said. It is important to be kept informed but without feeling overwhelmed.

**Use reliable and trusted sources** for your news such as:

BBC news

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news>

Government

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>



**Take breaks from social media** as it can be full of people’s opinions, fear, incorrect information and unwanted advice so some tips are to:



- Mute keywords and hashtags which may be triggering and unfollow or mute accounts.
- Mute WhatsApp groups and Facebook posts and feeds if you find them overwhelming.
- Set time limits for how long you spend on social media

**Keep to a routine** – we are all having to adjust to a strange, new way of life which can affect our mental wellbeing. Having a routine is important for our identity, self confidence and purpose. It may be tempting to stay in our pyjamas all day “because what is the point as I’m not going anywhere” but the benefits of getting up at a set time, getting dressed and including daily activities are great.



**Good sleep hygiene** - sleep is usually one of the first things to be affected by feelings of uncertainty and a change of routine. You may have also started experiencing vivid dreams. There are things you can do to try and help yourself sleep well:

- Avoid tea and coffee and don't drink alcohol in the evening before bed
- Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day
- Avoid watching TV, looking at devices and working from home in bed
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine that lets you unwind, telling your brain that it is time to sleep
- Try not to worry about not being able to sleep instead get up and do something relaxing like listen to some music, a meditation or read until you do feel sleepy.



**Stay Connected**—humans need social contact so it is important that you find ways to keep in touch with family and friends. Now is a good opportunity to become more familiar with online apps such as WhatsApp, Houseparty, FaceTime, Skype or Zoom.

- Have fun using TikTok and impress the younger members of your family! There are online gaming tournaments such as Scrabble, Chess etc that you could play with a group of friends.
- Or just keep it simple with a phone call, text or email. Not only will you be helping yourself you will be lifting someone else's mood by showing that you are thinking of them.

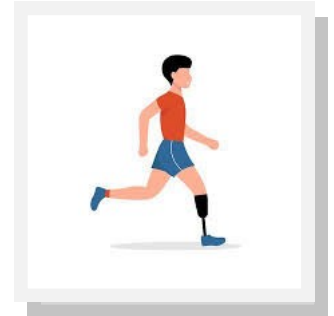


**Hobbies** - learn a new skill or go back to something you stopped or didn't have time for such as crafting, reading, cooking etc. Lots of these types of activities are very mindful and help with reducing anxiety levels.



**Move more every day** – if you have been given exercises by our physio team then please try to keep them up. If you usually wear a prosthetic limb, try to continue your normal wearing pattern for a comfortable number of hours daily around the house and garden. If you are allowed to safely leave your home for exercise then you can still do a short walk. It can be difficult to remain motivated and focused in times of uncertainty but it will benefit you when things get back to normal.

Find different ways to add more movement in your day – YouTube is a great source of videos for all types of exercises suitable for everyone. Movement, even if gentle stretching, is good for the mind. Maybe try some yoga which can be done from a chair.



**Try a relaxation technique** – meditation, breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation exercises are great in helping us focus on the present moment rather than ruminating on the past or worrying about the future which then improves our mental health and reduce negative feelings. Here is a link to some relaxation techniques – try them and find one that suits you



<https://www.cntw.nhs.uk/resource-library/relaxation-techniques/>

**Time to reflect**— find a time during the day to reflect on what went well and things that you are grateful for however small. Look out for some exercises and meditations to increase self-compassion, our counsellor will be able to help with sending you more details.

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts-for-your-wellbeing](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts-for-your-wellbeing)



**Learn about Mindfulness** — Mindfulness is about noticing when our thoughts have taken us away from the present moment and without any judgement and compassion we can bring ourselves back to the anchor of the here and now. This is usually done by placing our attention on the inhale and exhale of our breath



# What is Mindfulness?

**Mindfulness:** a state of nonjudgmental awareness of what's happening in the present moment, including the awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and senses.

## Components of Mindfulness

**Awareness**—During a state of mindfulness, you will notice your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as they happen. The goal isn't to clear your mind or to stop thinking—it's to become aware of your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting lost in them.

**Acceptance.** The thoughts, feelings, and sensations that you notice should be observed in a nonjudgmental manner. For example, if you notice a feeling of nervousness, simply state to yourself: "I notice that I am feeling nervous". There's no need further judge or change the feeling.

## Benefits of Mindfulness

Reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety

Improved memory, focus, and mental processing speed

Improved ability to adapt to stressful situations

Greater satisfaction within relationships

Reduced rumination (repetitively going over a thought or problem)

Improved ability to manage emotions

## Mindfulness Practice

**Note:** Mindfulness is a state of mind, rather than a particular action or exercise. However, without practice, mindfulness is difficult to achieve. These techniques are designed to help you practice.

### Mindfulness Meditation

Sit in a comfortable place, and begin paying attention to your breathing. Notice the physical sensation of air filling your lungs, and then slowly leaving. When your mind wanders—which it will—simply notice your thoughts, and turn your attention back to breathing.

### Mindfulness Walk

While walking, make a point to practice mindfulness. Start by noticing how your body moves and feels with each step. Then, expand your awareness to your surroundings. What do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? This technique can also be expanded to other daily activities.

### Body Scan

Pay close attention to the physical sensations throughout your body. Start with your feet, and move up through your legs, groin, abdomen, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, and face. Spend anywhere from 15 seconds to 1 minute on each body part.

### Five Senses

Make a conscious effort to notice the present moment through each of your senses.

5 things you see 4 things you feel

3 things you hear 2 things you smell

1 things you taste

## Deep Breathing Exercise

A very simple breathing exercise to call on when you notice yourself feeling stressed is

Breathe in for a count 4.

Hold the breath for a count of 4.

Exhale for a count of 6.

Repeat – practice for at least 2 minutes but preferably 5 to 10 minutes

## **THE 60 SECOND TRANQUILISER**

1. Say firmly to yourself 'TAKE CONTROL'
2. Repeat 'I CAN DO ANYTHING I WANT TO' breathe out slowly.
3. Slowly breathe in and allow your abdomen to soften and rise.
4. Pause slightly.
5. Slowly breathe out, slightly longer than breathing in.
6. Say to yourself 'I AM BREATHING IN PEACE AND BLOWING AWAY'



## **Tolerating Uncertainty with APPLE:**

A for AWARE – Notice the need for certainty as it comes up in your mind

P for PAUSE – Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Just pause, and breathe

P for PULL BACK – Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary

L for LET GO – let go of the thought or feeling about needing certainty. Tell yourself it is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think! Thoughts are not statements of fact. They will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.

E for EXPLORE – you can explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, we are ok. Notice your breathing, and the sensations of breathing. Notice the ground beneath you, look around you and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else – maybe carry on what you were doing before you noticed the worrying thought, or do something else – mindfully, with your full attention.



# Resources

If you are struggling to get food, medicines or other essentials please let your GP surgery know and they will see if you are eligible to receive help from the NHS Volunteer Responder service.

You can also contact your local authority who can help too:

**Dorset County Council Tel 01305 221000 8am—8pm 7 days per week**

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/emergencies-severe-weather/emergencies/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>

**Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council**

**Tel 0300 123 7052 or complete online form**

<https://www.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/News/News-Features/COVID19/coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>

## **Mental health resources:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-advice-to-support-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/help-and-information/covid-19-and-your-mental-health/>

- OCD Action <https://ocdaction.org.uk/>
- Connection – a 24/7 mental health helpline 0300 123 5440  
<https://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/access-mental-health>
- Dorset Mind <https://dorsetmind.uk/>
- Anxiety UK <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/> Text Service: 07537 416 905  
Helpline: 03444 775 774
- Samaritans  
<https://www.samaritans.org/>  
Tel 116 123