

Tips for Managing Mental Health during Coronavirus

We know that the current Coronavirus lockdown can be particularly difficult for autistic people. This page contains a range of tips based on evidence - with input from autistic people in our community and in our team who are putting them into practice. They should help you to keep your mental health and wellbeing in check.

1. Stay active

Keeping active makes you healthier in mind and body. It can also help you sleep. You don't have to be running miles every day, activities like housework, yoga and walking all count. The NHS have [classes you can do online](#).

I'm dyspraxic so can't run in the wild. Instead I've bought myself a trampoline and over the weekend I finished a couch to 5k... a bounce to 5k! Cat, Autistica staff member.

2. Understand your worry

If you find yourself worrying about current developments around COVID-19, that is okay. We're going through something new and strange, so worrying about it is understandable. That worry becomes a problem when you find that you're overwhelmed by it, and not able to enjoy the things that you normally would. Try to focus on things you can control, for example staying indoors as much as possible and following Government advice when you do leave the house.

I will have days when the anxiety is overwhelming. That's ok. On these days, I scrap all but the necessary tasks and practice some self care. Painting, drawing or gaming really helps on those days. Hannah, Autistica Play Ambassador.

3. Create structure and routine

Try to keep a similar routine to how life was before the lockdown. Making a plan for every day might also help you to get a balance of activities. Writing down what you have achieved in a day might be a helpful way to feel productive and more in control at this uncertain time.

I set an alarm each morning for work and try to keep my work and evenings separate. I also find keeping a diary helps me be more aware of how I am feeling, and stops all the days from blurring into one. Bethan, Autistica team.

4. Limit the amount of news you consume

It can be tempting to check for updates and new announcements but spending too much time checking the news can keep you in an anxious state. Set specific times to check the news. Also, make sure that you're checking credible sources. If you are getting updates from social media, are you sure they can be trusted? Are they focused on fact rather than prediction and catastrophising?

I limit time looking at the news. It's almost always terrible. Once a day, maybe twice. Harriet, Autistica Play Ambassador.

5. Connect with others

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We know that a sense of belonging and being connected to our communities and to others is important for mental wellbeing. Video calls, social media and online games can make all the difference, and can be a way of socialising in a controlled way that you can book into your daily schedule.

*We're all in the same boat, so my friends from Aberdeen and I used this as an opportunity to catch up over the weekend in the virtual pub - by video conference. **James, Autistica team.***

6. Check your usual supports

If you sometimes use supports like therapists, support groups or social groups, check in on their plans now. Are they holding alternative online events? Can you contact them over the phone/Skype? You may not feel like using them right now but we all have good days and bad days, so knowing how you can reach them might reduce your anxiety in the future if you do need to.

*I've been running a weekly virtual meetup on Zoom, and I'm planning more with my local Aspie group - including a virtual pub quiz. **George, autistic adult via Facebook.***

7. Eat and drink well

We know that food and mood are strongly linked. Many autistic people have restricted diets, but it's important to try to eat a balanced diet and stay hydrated. It's easy to slip into bad habits when your daily routine is interrupted. Sugary snacks such as sweets, biscuits, and alcohol can affect your mood. There are quarantine-friendly options such as chopped tomatoes, tinned fruit and frozen peas if fresh produce is hard to find.

*It's easy to forget to drink regularly. I've been using a hiking bottle because the markings remind me how much I am having. Mixing things up with squash, tea or even hot water adds a bit of variety to the day. **Colin, Autistica podcast presenter.***

8. Schedule in a nice thing every day

This can be different things to different people. It could be something you can do such as a soak in a bubble bath or playing a video game. It could be something that makes you think such as planning for the future or looking back at old photos. Maybe it's an act of kindness - saying or doing something nice for someone else, such as surprising someone with a message or a drawing.

*I'm letting myself be sad or anxious for a while - I call my allotted wallowing appointments Hippo Time. But after 10 mins I have to pick myself up and do something I enjoy - I've been listening to a lot of new music. **Flo, autistic adult - via Facebook.***

9. Try something new

There's a lot of pressure on people to use this time for self-improvement and strive for perfection, which isn't necessarily helpful. But research shows that trying new things can be good for your wellbeing - boosting self-esteem and a sense of purpose. You could try an online course, start drawing or writing, or have a mess about in the kitchen or garden. Be led by your own interests.