

EIGHT TIPS FOR COPING WITH PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

1. Don't let the daily news cycle wear you down

When you hear the case numbers each day, don't let the up-and-down get you down. Often, the cases will continue to rise for a week or so after the lockdown measures are implemented, both as a consequence of people taking a while to present with symptoms and as society adapts to the new rules.

Just because the numbers go up and down doesn't mean the Public Health Orders aren't working. Remember, we have some of the best Public Health professionals in the world, and they provide important advice that we should listen to.

Try to avoid watching the daily press conferences if hearing the daily case numbers or the blow-by-blow analysis stresses you out or gets you down. There's always written updates and summaries that will cover the important information you need to know without needing you to listen to all of the nitty-gritty. Get to know yourself and the point at which you hit information overload.

2. Make a routine and stick to it

Your daily routine is the one thing you have total control over. Try to exercise regularly and make sure you eat well. Endorphins from exercise and good nutrition will make you feel better. If you have a day where you don't stick to your routine, don't beat yourself up about it and spiral into a bad pattern. Just get back into your routine the next day and keep at it.

3. Try to get out of the house

Even though we need to limit non-essential movement, it's vital for our physical and mental health to move our bodies, get fresh air and feel the sunlight on our faces. Even if all you do is walk around the block on your own (wearing a mask, and keeping a distance from any passers-by) for fifteen minutes each day, you will feel so much better in the long run.

While you're out, take notice of the things that are different in your neighbourhood because of the lockdown - almost no traffic along empty main roads, more people in the park in the evenings, all the people exercising outdoors - and marvel at them. These will be the moments you remember when life goes back to normal.

4. Try not to overwork yourself

Don't fall in to the trap of overworking yourself just because you're Working-from-Home now. Avoid doing more than your normal hours each day or carrying work over into the weekend. This is still your time to recover, rest and relax, and this is more important than ever under the circumstances.

If you can, leave the space in your home where you're working at the end of the workday. If you can't physically escape it, consider packing your workspace up at the end of the day so that the living area in your home returns to "normal" while you're not working. This will help you separate your work and your home life again and make it easier to return to normal when the lockdown is over.

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5. Make a list of things you want to do during lockdown

Chances are there is a long list of things you've wanted to find time to do but haven't been able to because of the day-to-day pressures of your work, family and social life. Maybe there's a series on Netflix you've wanted to sit down and watch? Perhaps you have a pile of books from Christmas that haven't been read, a cookbook full of new recipes to try or you have hobbies and projects around the house that are desperate for your attention.

Now that you can't go out in the evening or across the weekend, you have a perfect excuse to put your energy and attention into this list of rewarding activities you'd possibly forgotten all about.

6. Monitor your alcohol intake

Whether it's regular video-conference "drinks" with colleagues or you've simply decided to pour yourself a glass of wine to unwind after a day "at work", take care to ensure that you don't use your extra spare time or the lack of a drive home to drink more than normal or more than is reasonable.

Check in with yourself each morning to see if a change in the amount of alcohol you're consuming during lockdown is adding to any anxiety you're having about the situation.

A few drinks a week is fine, but stay in tune with what's helping and what's not.

7. Enjoy the extra money you're saving

Maybe you're saving money because you aren't using petrol or public transport, or perhaps you're eating dinner at home more often, but there's every chance you've accidentally saved a bit of cash during lockdown. Set some aside to pay your bills (especially if you've been running the heater all day), and then start saving toward a post-lockdown getaway or long-weekend trip so you've got something to look forward to. Perhaps you need something for the house, or you've been putting something off because you didn't have the money. Now you do! Enjoy the fact that you have a bit more money to spend on the things that sometimes get neglected or forgotten about.

8. Check in by phone with friends and family

Don't forget to maintain and sustain the connections with friends and family that you have always depended upon. It might be impossible to see one another in the ways you're accustomed to, but it is important to stay in touch with the people that give us strength or with whom we enjoy catching up.

Those chats will be extra special at the moment, and sometimes you won't realise how much you value them until you put down the phone. Try to do this at least every couple of days, and remember that while you may be coping okay, one of your nearest and dearest may be struggling on their own, so it's worth picking up the phone if only just to check in on them.