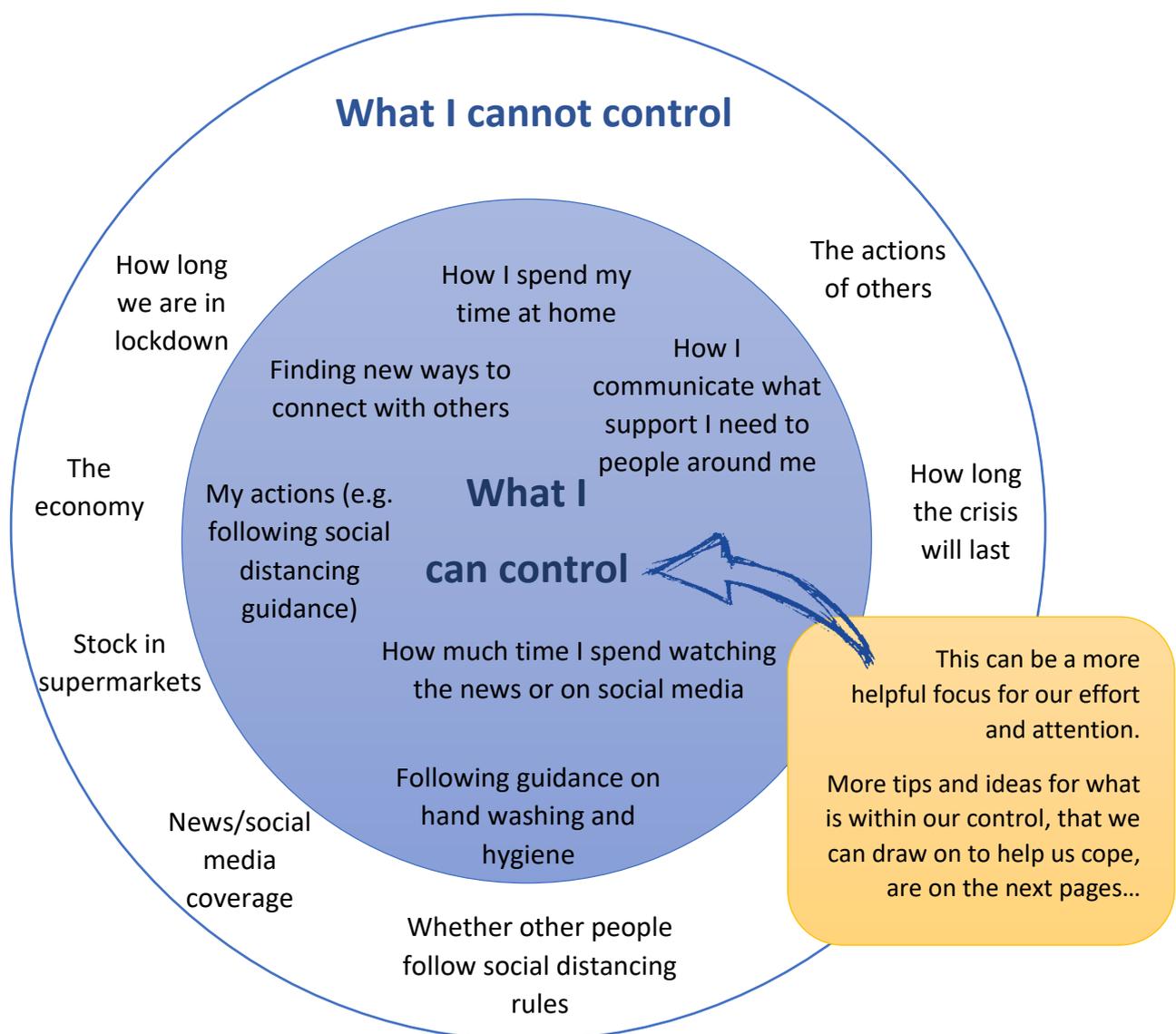


Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Persistent Pain

Some resources and tips for coping

You may have concerns or worries about how to manage living with persistent or chronic pain due to the impact of the current coronavirus outbreak on day to day life and on NHS services.

Anxiety and worry are natural and understandable responses to what is happening in our world right now. There is a lot of uncertainty and a lot that is not in our control. But there are some things which we can do that are in our control, and this may help us to feel a little better. To help you to do this we put together some tips and ideas for coping, as well as a list of helpful resources in this pack.



Coping with pain during isolation/while social distancing

Structure and routine

- Try to keep to a sleep/wake routine
- Have an outline for your day.
- Try to include a balance between enjoyable, satisfying and necessary activities as well as some time to relax!

Include engaging activities

Activities which are neither too easy nor too difficult, and that really capture our attention can be very helpful in keeping our minds occupied. This can mean there is less space for difficult thoughts or worries about pain or other things to creep in. Examples include painting, photography, crafting, baking, knitting, yoga and gardening.

Take care of yourself

Although a lot of this may seem basic, it can make a big difference to how you feel and have a positive effect on pain.

Try to:

- Eat regularly and healthily as much as you are able (of course treats are great every now and again!)
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid too much caffeine or excessive alcohol (these can affect pain and sleep)
- Get washed and dressed where possible

Sleep

Sleep is often really affected by pain and this, coupled with being in a difficult situation, can make it hard to get your rest. Here are some tips:

- Create a pleasant environment – declutter your room, bring in items that bring you a sense of peace or connection such as mementoes or photographs of loved ones or special places, getting the temperature right can also help (the sleep council recommend 16-18°C).
- Keep your bedroom technology free – light from devices like mobiles and tablets can make it harder to fall asleep, so try to avoid these in the hour before bed and switch them off if taking them into the bedroom.
- Use relaxation or breathing techniques to help you feel more settled before bed

Relaxation and breathing techniques

There is good evidence that stress can “turn the volume up” on pain. It can be useful to take time each day to unwind. Relaxation can take many forms, here are some ideas:

- Use your senses and really try to pay attention to the physical sensations you experience e.g. take a warm bath or shower, listen to relaxing music, or savour a comforting warm drink.
- Deliberately take slower, deeper breaths. This can have a big benefit for reducing stress and tension. One technique you could try is called box breathing:
 1. Sitting upright, slowly exhale through your mouth, releasing all the air from your lungs for a count of four
 2. Hold for four
 3. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose to the count of four.
 4. Hold for four...and repeat for as long as feels helpful to you.
- Try guided relaxation or meditation. Relaxation exercises for you to try can be found here: <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/audio-resources/>

Staying active

Being in the house a lot may mean that you become less active than usual. You may feel concerned that this could lead to becoming in worse physical condition and to increased lethargy and fatigue. Here are some tips for staying active:

- Many day to day household activities are opportunities to get moving e.g. cleaning, gardening and DIY (this way you get to kill two birds with one stone!) but do try to work with your limits and don't push it too far.
- Pace yourself by taking regular short breaks or changing to a less strenuous activity every so often. You can find tips on pacing here: <https://my.livewellwithpain.co.uk/resources/booklets-and-leaflets/pacing/>
- If you would like to incorporate more formal home exercises you could try this guidance here: <https://www.csp.org.uk/public-patient/rehabilitation-exercises>
- Gentle exercise such as pilates can be performed at home using video guidance: <https://www.nhs.uk/video/pages/pilates-for-chronic-back-pain.aspx>

Connection and support

There are lots of ways to stay in touch e.g. text, telephone, video-calling (e.g. FaceTime or Skype) or social media. Here are some ideas for boosting your sense of connection:

- As well as having a chat, you could try doing activities together over the phone/facetime etc, such as watching a movie or playing a game or even a mini-book club where you read the same book and catch up about your thoughts regularly.
- If holding the phone to your ear is too painful, you could consider getting a headset to support you in having longer conversations and to keep your hands free.
- If you are feeling isolated at home and would like to make new connections, perhaps look on social media for support or interest groups.

Communication

Communicating about pain can be difficult at any time. It may feel that being around each other more or stress about coronavirus put extra strain on this. Some ideas:

- Say what you need, e.g. time alone, to be listened to without the other person feeling they have to offer solutions, advice or practical support. We all need different things at different times and it can help ease tension to be clear from the start about what help we need so the other person doesn't feel they need to guess and we don't end up feeling misunderstood, upset or ignored.
- Try a traffic light or number scale for your pain so your partner or family member knows what kind of day you are having.

It's ok not to be ok

Go easy on yourself – this is not an easy time. There will be times when you feel difficult feelings, and there will be days when pain feels worse. On those days, let yourself be and do what you can that day. Each day will be different, and you are doing the best you can in difficult circumstances.

Recognise what you are doing to help

Some people find that words like "isolation" or "lockdown" make them feel worried or helpless. If you find this, you could try thinking instead about how, by remaining at home and following the guidance, you are actively resisting spreading the virus. Remember the virus can't move by itself– people move it! Your choice to stay home is supporting the NHS and contributing to keeping yourself and others well.

Additional Resources

Coping with persistent pain

- <https://my.livewellwithpain.co.uk/>
- <https://www.paintoolkit.org/>

Understanding persistent pain

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwd-wLdIHjs> 'Why things hurt' by Lorimer Moseley
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_3phB93rvI 'Understanding Pain in 5 minutes' by Live active
- <https://www.retrainpain.org/>
- <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/fibromyalgia/>

Coping with the emotional impact of Coronavirus

- <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>
- <https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/>
- Apps to support mental well-being and sleep can be found here: www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health

Managing the financial impact of Coronavirus

- <https://www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en/top-tips/how-to-budget-your-money-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>
- **Money Advice Service** Tel. 0800 138 7777
- **Citizens Advice Bureau** Tel. 0844 111 444
- **Job Centre Plus** Benefits Enquiry line Tel. 0345 604 3719

Mental health support

- **My Wellbeing College** are continuing to offer support for mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety via telephone and online. You can self refer here <http://bmywellbeingcollege.nhs.uk/register/> or call 0300 555 5551
- **Guide-Line.** A confidential telephone helpline provided by the mental health charity MIND which provides mental health support and information. Tel: 01274 594594. (12pm-9pm, 7 days a week, 365 days a year).

Bereavement support

- **Cruse helpline:** 0808 808 1677 (Monday and Friday 9.30-5pm [excluding bank holidays]; Tuesday to Thursday 9.30-8pm). Helpful information about coronavirus and bereavement can be found here: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/grieving-and-isolation>

Local and National Crisis Services

- *If you feel that you are at risk of harming yourself:*
 - **First Response** Tel. 01274 221181 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
 - **Samaritans** Tel. 08457 909090 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
- *If you feel at risk of harm from others in your home:*
 - **National domestic violence helpline.** Tel. 0800 2000 247 (24/7)
 - **Survive and thrive.** Tel. 0808 2800 999 (www.stayingput.uk.net)