

# Managing your emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic

## A guide for people with cancer and blood conditions

### About this booklet

This booklet provides advice and resources to help you manage your emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have any questions or concerns, or need further support, please contact the Macmillan Support and Information Service on 020 3447 3816.

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## 1. Introduction

A diagnosis of cancer or a blood condition and treatment can be challenging and it may affect your physical and emotional wellbeing. When faced with the unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, you may be finding it harder to manage these challenges.

It is important to remember what you are dealing with is significant. We hope that this booklet will provide you with the right information and resources to help your emotional wellbeing.

The charity websites listed below have information specifically related to the coronavirus:

- Anxiety UK – Coronanxiety support and resources  
[www.anxietyuk.org.uk/coronanxiety-support-resources/](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/coronanxiety-support-resources/)
- Macmillan Cancer Support – Cancer and Coronavirus  
[www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/cancer-and-coronavirus](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/cancer-and-coronavirus)
- MIND Charity – Coronavirus and your mental wellbeing  
[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/)
- NHS – Coronavirus and your mental wellbeing  
[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/)

## 2. Dealing with uncertainty

We recognise that the support and care that you are used to having may have been disrupted since the COVID-19 outbreak, and this may have left you worried or uncertain about what's next. You may also be missing the reassurance of going into the hospital clinic where you see familiar faces.

When you focus on questions with uncertain answers, thinking over all the different scenarios that may or may not happen, or feel yourself getting caught up in fear of what might happen, try to shift your focus to things you can control. We have listed some websites that offer advice about managing uncertainty and anxiety:

- Dealing with uncertainty of cancer (Macmillan Cancer Support):  
[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/uncertainty](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/uncertainty)
- Managing anxiety (Macmillan Cancer Support):  
[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/anxiety](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/anxiety)
- An animated video sharing some tips and guidance on how to respond to COVID-19 effectively: [youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUYM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=BmvNCdpHUYM)

### 3. Things you can do yourself to help you feel more in control

#### Develop a routine

Regular routines are essential for our identity, self-confidence and purpose. It is very important to feel a sense of 'normality' in this ever changing situation.

Try to start your day at roughly the same time that you usually would. Aim to set aside time each day for activities that are important to you, such as exercise, connecting with others, creativity and relaxation.

Cancer and blood conditions, and their treatment, can cause you to feel fatigued. This may now be heightened if you are isolating at home with little stimulation. If you don't have enough energy to do everything you used to do, try to plan ahead. This can help you to do the things that are most important to you.

You might find it helpful if you:

- Plan:** Write a list of all the things you have to do.
- Prioritise:** Work out what's most important to you each day and put that at the top of your list.
- Pace:** Allow extra time to get things done. Stop before you get too tired.
- Permission:** Give yourself permission to do things differently and take things easy.
- Position:** Make the task easier. Could you sit down instead of stand?

*(Source: Prostate Cancer UK)*

#### Keep active

If possible, build physical activity into your daily routine. Most of us don't have exercise equipment at home, but there are lots of activities you can do to keep your body moving, such as:

- cleaning your home
- going up and down stairs
- seated exercises
- online workouts that you can follow
- sitting less – if you notice you've been sitting for an hour, get up or change position.

There is a list of resources which can help you to be more physically active on page 9.

Below are the NHS web pages which have guidelines on how to exercise safely:

- NHS guidelines on exercise for adults aged 19 to 64 years old:  
[www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/)
- NHS guidelines on exercise for older adults:  
[www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/)

## Improve your sleep

There are a few things you can do to improve your sleep:

- Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even at the weekend.
- Try to get some natural sunlight during the day by opening your curtains and windows where possible. This helps to regulate your body clock which can help you sleep better.
- Keep physically active at home.
- Avoid tea, coffee and alcohol in the evening.
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine that lets you unwind and sends a signal to your brain that it's time to sleep.
- If you can't sleep, don't worry about it. Get up and do something relaxing like listening to music or reading until you feel sleepy.

## Meditation, mindfulness, and relaxation

Mindfulness is the ability to be present, to rest in the here and now and to be fully engaged with whatever we're doing in the moment.

Meditation aims to train our attention and awareness, and achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state. This can be done by using a certain technique, such as mindfulness, or by focusing the mind on a particular object, thought or activity. Meditation has been shown to help people stress less, focus more and even sleep better.

Here are some websites to guide you through mindfulness and meditation exercises:

- [www.mindful.org/focus-attention](http://www.mindful.org/focus-attention)
- [www.headspace.com/meditation/10-minute-meditation](http://www.headspace.com/meditation/10-minute-meditation)
- [www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide](http://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide)

Relaxation techniques can help to calm and relax your body and mind. They are particularly helpful if you feel stressed or anxious.

More information about relaxation is available from the charity Mind:

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/)

## Distract yourself

Distraction is a useful short-term technique that can help to reduce anxiety quickly. It is difficult for our minds to focus on more than one thing at a time so distraction provides something else for you to focus on rather than your worry or fear.

There are many different techniques that you can try, such as listening to music, reading a book, watching TV or cooking. We have listed other activities that may also help on pages 5 and 6.

## Puzzles

Doing a puzzle or a simple problem solving activity can disrupt negative and unhelpful thoughts. Try splitting up your time so you have bursts of activity and then take breaks if you need to.

Some examples of puzzles you could try:

- Crosswords which you could do online or print out at home:  
[simplydailypuzzles.com/daily-quick-crossword/](http://simplydailypuzzles.com/daily-quick-crossword/)
- Sudoku: [sudoku.com/](http://sudoku.com/)
- Jigsaw puzzles: [www.jigsawplanet.com/](http://www.jigsawplanet.com/)
- Brain games: [www.brain-games.co.uk/](http://www.brain-games.co.uk/)

## Get creative

As well as being a distraction, doing something creative can also bring satisfaction and joy. We have included some examples of creative activities below:

### 1. Origami



Our creative specialist Dr Lizzie Burns has set up a YouTube channel which guides viewers through making origami:

[youtube.com/channel/UC4RXqmAFrGGKSRbO\\_t20E7Q](https://youtube.com/channel/UC4RXqmAFrGGKSRbO_t20E7Q)

Lizzie does a new origami fold every week.

### 2. Scrapbooking

Scrapbooking is a method of preserving, presenting and arranging personal and family history in the form of a book, box or card. You can use memorabilia including photographs and artwork.

Scrapbooking helps to relieve stress and promote relaxation, and can give you an opportunity to reflect on special memories. When you sit down to work on creating a scrapbook page, your ever-racing mind is forced to concentrate on the here and now.

## Colouring in

Colouring in for adults and can feel very therapeutic and calming as it relaxes the part of your brain that is linked to fear. It induces the same state as meditating by reducing the thoughts of anxiety and stress and by focusing on the present. You can order colouring books online.

### Tidy and clean your room or house

People are more stressed, distracted and less productive in disorganised spaces, and an uncluttered environment can reduce anxiety.

Cleaning and tidying can truly have a similar effect that meditation does if you're able to focus on the task and force the negative thoughts out.

**It's important to remember that distraction should only be used for short periods of time. If you have ongoing worries or anxiety, use other strategies to help you cope better in the long term. If you are struggling, you could also be referred for psychological support (see page 8 for more details).**

### Appreciate the small things

Even though everything could be feeling very overwhelming at the moment, try to keep in mind some of the small things that you are grateful for during this time.

We can improve our mental wellbeing through appreciation and gratitude. Can you notice and appreciate the good things that may be happening in your life and that make you smile, even if it's for a short time?

Before you go to bed, write down one or more things that have happened to you that day that made you feel positive or appreciative. This could be your morning cup of tea, daffodils blooming, blue sky, your favourite song playing on the radio, or a phone call from a friend. On days when you're feeling a little low or anxious, you can read back over these lists to remind yourself of the little things you were grateful for.

### Enjoy nature

Bringing nature into your everyday life can improve your mood, reduce feelings of stress or anger, and make you feel more relaxed.

It's possible to still get the positive effects from nature while staying indoors. You can:

- Spend time with the windows open to let in fresh air.
- Grow plants or flowers on windowsills. For example, you could buy seeds online or look for any community groups that give seeds or plants away.
- Arrange a comfortable space to sit. For example, you can sit by a window where you can look out over a view of trees or the sky, or watch birds and other animals.
- Get as much natural light as you can. Spend time in your garden if you have one, or sit by a window.

### **Do random acts of kindness**

Research shows that helping others can be beneficial to our own mental health. It can reduce stress, improve our emotional wellbeing and even benefit our physical health.

The Mental Health Foundation has tips on their website about doing random acts of kindness: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/random-acts-kindness](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/random-acts-kindness)

### **Connect with others**

Talk to those close to you when you can. It helps to share what is making you anxious, and knowing you are not alone can help you cope. Explore ways of connecting that work for you, whether that's by post, over the phone, social media or video-chat. This could be anything from sharing a cup of tea over video, playing an online game together, or simply sending a supportive text message.

Macmillan Cancer Support has an online community where you can connect with other people who have cancer: [community.macmillan.org.uk/](http://community.macmillan.org.uk/)

### **Ask for support**

We all may need some extra support through this challenging time. For example, you may need someone to collect your medicines or food supplies, or you may need extra support to connect with others. Don't feel worried about asking for support if you need it.

You can also get in touch with volunteers and charities supporting those vulnerable and isolating: [www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/)

## **4. Support available at University College Hospital Macmillan Support and Information Service**

Even though everything may look slightly different at the Cancer Centre at the moment, we would like to reassure you that our service and support is still out there for you.

You can read up about our services and the adjustments we have made on our webpage: [www.uclh.nhs.uk/OurServices/ServiceA-Z/Cancer/CSS/MCIC/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.uclh.nhs.uk/OurServices/ServiceA-Z/Cancer/CSS/MCIC/Pages/Home.aspx)

### **Support and information helpline**

Our support and information specialists are still available to support you. We have set up a UCLH support and information helpline where you can get emotional support, practical advice and information from our team of healthcare professionals. If you feel frightened or lonely, or if you just want to talk things through, please call our team on **020 3447 3816** or email us at [uclh.supportandinformation@nhs.net](mailto:uclh.supportandinformation@nhs.net)

## Psychological and emotional care teams

If you are experiencing ongoing issues of anxiety or low mood, or find it difficult to manage these thoughts and feelings, you may want to speak to a psychologist or counsellor from our psychological and emotional care teams. You will have a chance to talk about how you are feeling and apply proven self-help techniques to improve your psychological and emotional wellbeing. If you'd like to be referred, please talk to your hospital nurse or doctor, or a support and information specialist. The psychological and emotional care team can also support your relatives and carers.

Your first appointment will include an assessment of your needs and the type of support which may help. Following that, you will be offered the most appropriate psychological support sessions for you. Currently all appointments are telephone consultations.

## Complementary therapies

Our complementary therapy team currently offer the following therapies through a telephone consultation:

### Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy can help to reduce or manage stress, anxiety, nausea or fatigue, lift mood, or support relaxation or sleep. During the phone consultation one of our aromatherapists will find out what you would like help with and the kind of smells that you like. An individual inhaler, called an aromastick, will be made up for you to meet your needs and will then be posted out to you.



### Relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques can help you feel more relaxed if you are feeling stressed, worried or have difficulty sleeping. The therapist will guide you through one or more relaxation techniques, and discuss how you can use the technique(s) yourself following the telephone consultation. The types of relaxation techniques you may be guided through are mindful breathing, body relaxation and guided visualisation.

You can ask your hospital doctor or nurse, or a support and information specialist to refer you. You can also call **020 3447 8663** to request an appointment. If the call goes to voicemail, please leave your name, hospital number, telephone number and a short description of your query. We will call you back within two working days.

## 5. Other resources

Here is a list of other resources you may find helpful. If you don't have access to the internet, please call us on **020 3447 3816** and we will provide you with the information in a different format.

### Charity websites

- Cancer Research UK: [www.cancerresearchuk.org/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/)
- Macmillan Cancer Support: [www.macmillan.org.uk/](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/)
- Mental Health Foundation: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/)
- MIND: [www.mind.org.uk/](http://www.mind.org.uk/)
- Sickle Cell Society: [www.sicklecellsociety.org/](http://www.sicklecellsociety.org/)
- UK Thalassaemia Society: [ukts.org/](http://ukts.org/)

### Useful websites for different types of exercises

- Joe Wicks (British fitness coach) at-home workouts available on YouTube
- NHS Fitness Studio exercise videos (aerobic, dance, strength and resistance exercises, Pilates, yoga, chair-based Pilates and other fitness plans available): [www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/)
- British Heart Foundation chair-based exercises: [www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/chair-based-exercises](http://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/chair-based-exercises)
- 5 minute tai chi exercise: [youtube.com/watch?v=cEOS2zoyQw4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=cEOS2zoyQw4)

### Physical activity resources from Macmillan Cancer Support

#### Booklet

Offers advice about being more physically active following cancer treatment. You can download it or order it online to be sent to your home:

[be.macmillan.org.uk/be/p-24885-physical-activity-and-cancer.aspx](http://be.macmillan.org.uk/be/p-24885-physical-activity-and-cancer.aspx)

#### Move More activity pack

An activity pack which includes the physical activity booklet, flyers about popular types of physical activity and a DVD of gentle exercises. Order it online at

[be.macmillan.org.uk/be/p-24948-move-more-your-guide-to-becoming-more-active.aspx](http://be.macmillan.org.uk/be/p-24948-move-more-your-guide-to-becoming-more-active.aspx)

#### Video

Advice about being physically before and during cancer treatment: [youtu.be/ZRP\\_hiwVflc](https://youtu.be/ZRP_hiwVflc)

## Phone apps

App for physical activity

- 12-week exercise plan available from the NHS Apps Library:  
[www.nhs.uk/apps-library/iprescribe-exercise/](http://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/iprescribe-exercise/)

Apps to help manage anxiety:

- Headspace
- Calm

## Podcasts

There are podcasts from the Mental Health Foundation to help you manage psychological and emotional wellbeing. They are available at [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/) and cover the following topics:

1. Stress and the mind (relaxation exercise)
2. Overcoming fear and anxiety
3. Exercise and mental health

**University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust cannot accept responsibility for information provided by external organisations.**

## 6. Contact details

### Macmillan Support and Information Service

Telephone: 020 3447 3816 (Support and information helpline)

020 3447 8663 (for general enquiries)

Email: [uclh.supportandinformation@nhs.net](mailto:uclh.supportandinformation@nhs.net)

Address: University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre  
Huntley Street  
London WC1E 6AG

Website: [www.uclh.nhs.uk](http://www.uclh.nhs.uk)

If you need a large print, audio, braille, easy read, age-friendly or translated copy of this leaflet, contact the patient information team on 020 3447 4735 or email [uclh.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:uclh.patientinformation@nhs.net). We will do our best to meet your needs.