

## ***Mental wellness during COVID-19***



We are now Day 30-something into lockdown (I've lost count honestly). We have had to continue with life and work, while adjusting to new routines and all feelings around COVID-19. We have had to [grieve](#) over cancelled plans and life changes, we worry about family and friends, we wonder about the future and crave the 'normality' of our old lives, but know that the normal we once knew doesn't exist anymore. In the future, life is not going to be the same, and that can have an impact on our mental health and state of well-being.

If mental health is a state of well-being, in which you are resilient to change and can cope with the stresses of life, what are well-being and wellness? They consist of feeling empowered, secure and content as a whole person, taking conscious and deliberate steps to cultivate a balanced lifestyle ([Swarbrick & Yudof, 2015](#)). Just like our physical health, our mental health and wellness require some work and intentionality.

Given the lockdown and pandemic, our usual habits and general lifestyle have been disrupted. Take some time to consider the impact of the current situation on your state of wellness:

- What losses have you experienced (e.g. social, work, security, routine)? It's okay to feel disappointed and lost. Accept those feelings and recognise it's part of the 'grieving' process.
- What healthy habits have you kept or adopted? What's working in your new normal and what's not? Identify the areas of your life that need some attention.
  - o This [resource, developed by the Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey](#), breaks wellness down into eight dimensions (physical, spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, occupational, environmental and financial), and has a handy guide to help you identify areas that may need some work. I highly recommend it!

Now take some time to explore how to cultivate a positive and healthy state of wellness. This shouldn't feel like another task on your To-do list. Make the changes you feel capable of, big or small!

- Practice mindfulness. Take some time to be fully present in whatever you are doing. Some helpful apps include Headspace and Calm. I personally use Headspace when I have trouble sleeping; they have excellent sleep aids, which help me stop my thoughts from spiralling out of control during the night.
- Practice [gratitude](#). Maybe it's through keeping a diary or talking/texting with a friend. Take time to recognise what there is to be thankful for in a day, it's incredibly impactful. Some days it's obvious, and other days maybe it's just the sunshine.
- Schedule routine check-ins with a trusted friend. Take this time to be honest about how you feel and where you need support.
- Be intentional! Set up video calls with family and friends to chat, have tea, play games, watch Netflix, have a dance party, cook, bake, whatever!



- Do something you enjoy. Spend time listening to your favourite music, take a free virtual museum tour, put on a facemask, read a book, play an instrument. Indulge yourself.
- Schedule when you read the news and if you find it overwhelming, limit yourself to a specified amount of time.

Most importantly, be kind to yourself. Show yourself some compassion and know it's okay to struggle. Don't feel that you failed because you are not accomplishing as much as you thought you would during lockdown – these are not normal circumstances we're living under. Celebrate positive change and know we're all in this together.

*We extend our gratitude to Madison Wimmers for writing this article.*

■ OIE In-house Times – 23 April 2020