

# COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH

## **Coronavirus: how can you look after your mental health ?**

As news about coronavirus (COVID-19) dominates the headlines and public concern is on the rise, remember that taking care of your mental health is as important as looking after your physical wellbeing.

Here are some tips from the Santépsy/Psy-Gesundheit/SalutePsi mental health service on how to take care of your mental health despite the crisis and being confined to your home. The advice is drawn primarily from documents written by various mental health experts.

## 1) TAKE CARE OF YOUR MIND

- Don't let fearful thoughts about the disease take over
- Manage stress (relax, meditate or do breathing exercises)
- Be patient and understanding, respect and accept the official measures
- Put up with uncertainty and be flexible when the situation changes

Despite this unfamiliar situation it's possible to cultivate a sense of wellbeing and take care of yourself. It's important to maintain a feeling of hope. Concentrate on the things you can control (for example live a healthy lifestyle, keep in touch with your friends and family, etc.) rather than on the virus and consequences you can't control.

Taking care of your mental health also means acknowledging your emotions. It's normal to feel stressed, anxious or upset. Allow yourself time to notice and express your feelings. This could be by writing them in a journal, talking to others, doing something creative or practising meditation.

## 2) TAME YOUR ANXIETY

- Fear is normal and useful because it means you will follow the official recommendations. But it can also provoke
  - Inappropriate panic
  - A tendency to deny or downplay reality
- The trouble is that these two reactions make the problems worse!

Experiencing a certain amount of fear is completely normal and useful, because it makes you adopt protective behaviour and respect the recommendations issued by the authorities. But it's important to ensure that fear doesn't turn into panic. It can be helpful to take time out if you're feeling overwhelmed by your emotions. There are certain useful tactics you can adopt: concentrate on objective facts, only trust reliable sources and avoid sensational stories. It's also important to share what you're experiencing with someone you can confide in, and dare to ask for help if you need it.

## 3) SEEK ACCURATE INFORMATION

- Be discriminating:
- Limit yourself to reading information only from official sources like the FOPH or the cantons



- Get into a healthy routine for consuming news and don't follow it constantly
- Don't broadcast or get submerged in fake news or rumours

It's important to limit yourself to searching for and reading information provided by official and legitimate sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) and the cantons. It's also important to set boundaries as to how much coronavirus news you read, watch or listen to. Consider turning off automatic notifications and taking a break from the news.

## 4) STAY BUSY

With our social lives slowing right down we have more time on our hands. It's important to maintain a certain routine:

- Play with your children/pets
- Do manual work or something creative (knitting, painting...)
- Gardening, home improvement...
- Go for a walk in the open air if you can
- Read a book, watch a film, etc.
- Tidy up...
- Whatever you do, always keep to the social distancing rules.

It's easier to manage all your activities and responsibilities if you maintain a healthy lifestyle by continuing to eat properly, exercise, get enough sleep and do things you enjoy. Giving your day structure and routine by combining time for work and time for leisure, time together and time alone, professional and personal activities (as a family or individually), will also help you cope with this period of confinement more calmly and serenely.

## 5) SHOW SOLIDARITY

- Take care of the community by respecting the official rules of behaviour
- Offer help to people around you who need it (for example do their shopping and leave it in front of their door)
- Stay in touch with family and friends (by phone or social networks)
- Reach out to people who are isolated with news and support (mail, photos and regular contact)

Being connected with other people is essential to overcome this crisis. It's important to stay in contact not only with friends and relatives, but also with elderly people and those who are isolated and vulnerable. Nobody should be left socially disconnected during this stressful period.

Whenever possible, think about helping those who need it, but also remember to ask for support if you need it, for example if you're feeling exhausted, overwhelmed or vulnerable. Don't hesitate to talk about your worries and emotions. It's a good way of taking a step back, understanding what you're going through and tackling the challenges you're facing.



## 6) WORK

- Follow your employer's directives. Some are going to have to work, on site or remotely. Others are going to have to stay at home. Respect that.
- You're showing just as much solidarity by staying at home and helping limit the risk of the virus spreading as those who are out fighting the epidemic directly. You can also support the common effort through small gestures towards those who have to work on the front line.

The crisis has confined all of us to our homes and is forcing many of us to telework. Many of us have to juggle working at home with organising family life and homeschooling and/or keeping the children occupied.

In this situation it's important to find a daily routine that combines time for work, time for family or household duties, and time for leisure and relaxation. It's good to get ready for going to your home office and not spend the whole day in indoor clothes. Once you're set up, try as far as possible to stick to your working habits, talk to your colleagues and take breaks.

## 7) TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

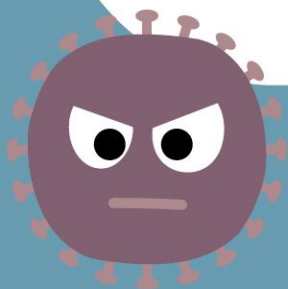
- Eat regular, varied meals and get enough sleep at regular hours
- Take care of your body (get exercise, fresh air and sunshine, and continue your usual treatments as prescribed, etc.)
- Keep an eye on yourself: identify symptoms and nurse yourself at home; observe how things develop; respect the recovery and convalescence period

As far as possible maintain a daily routine that gives your wellbeing priority: eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep and do things you enjoy. Try to schedule time for physical activity: activities like taking a walk (if you can), meditating or exercising can help you to relax and will have a positive impact on your thoughts and feelings.

## 8) COUPLES AND FAMILIES UNDER STRAIN

The partial lockdown has increased the problem of crowding and lack of privacy at home. This can make the tensions worse and add to people's stress, anxiety and feeling of isolation. It's important to remember certain things:

- Taking some time and space for yourself or getting out in the fresh air (while keeping to the social distancing rules) can help reduce the pressure in your family.
- Advice and help hotlines are available specifically for men under pressure
- The consequences of the novel coronavirus situation never justify violence
- The police and the services providing assistance and support to the victims of domestic and family violence are still available via the usual advice and help lines
- Victims of domestic violence may leave their home to ask for outside help
- Neighbours must call the police if they suspect violence



24-hour phone numbers:

Police 117

Medical emergencies 144

[Website of Victim Support Switzerland](#)

## 9) ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

It's normal to experience worry or even anxiety about the present or future. There are a number of things that can help in a situation like this.

- It's important to share your fears and preoccupations so you're not left alone with them
- Each person's economic situation is different. Even if they don't yet cover every situation adequately, the solutions provided by the federal and cantonal authorities will evolve; contact your canton, your professional body or union for more information
- Don't forget that you're not alone; the whole of society is affected. The political authorities and the relevant social and economic players are mobilising their forces; to help the economy recover they will have to continue doing so well after the pandemic is over.

Many people in the economy and society, whether they're employed or self-employed, have been hit hard by the situation and are worried about the future. Maybe you're one of them. It's normal to feel preoccupied or anxious. It's important to find out about the support options available. The [federal government](#) and the cantons have put measures in place that will be adapted regularly. Your professional body or union will certainly also be able to provide you with information.

It's important to take care of yourself psychologically. Maintain hope and remember that you're not alone in facing this situation. If you don't want to discuss things with your family and friends, you can talk to your family doctor or even call [143](#) for the Dargebotene Hand/La Main Tendue/Telefono Amico. They're there to listen 24 hours a day. Some cantons have also set up mental health hotlines (see [here](#) for the relevant numbers).

### Important information

The emergency psychiatric services continue to operate; you'll find the relevant phone number for your canton [here](#).

- You can call [143](#) Dargebotene Hand/La Main Tendue/Telefono Amico and [147](#) for children and young people 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- You can also call the **Caritas** or **Centre social protestant** social advice lines for help and guidance.



## Resources

Brochure: 10 steps toward mental health published by psy.ch, available in 11 languages:  
<https://www.migesplus.ch/en/publications/10-steps-towards-to-menthal-health>

Coronavirus prevention video made by the Swiss Red Cross (in German with subtitles in 12 languages)  
<https://www.migesplus.ch/fr/publications/arretons-le-virus>

Video recommended by Migesplus about taking care of your body:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpGN5ovwFBM>

Brief information on Victim Support available in 9 foreign languages spoken in Switzerland:  
<https://www.opferhilfe-schweiz.ch/en/>

