

Looking after mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19

COVID-19 is changing our daily lives. It's important to look after our wellbeing and the wellbeing of our whānau and community as we get through this – together.

It's a tense time for most of us. COVID-19 is scary, and it's rapidly changing the way we work, socialise, travel, access healthcare, exercise, shop and live. We know many people are feeling anxious, stressed, worried and scared. It's time to work out how we're going to look after our own wellbeing and the wellbeing of our whānau and community as we get through this – together.

You can free call or text 1737 at any time to speak with a trained counsellor – it's free and confidential.

The number one message we want New Zealanders to hear is this: we will get through this if we work together. Connecting with people who make you feel safe and loved is the most important thing you can do to look after your mental health and the mental health of people around you. Self-isolation or staying at home makes this difficult, but not impossible. We're going to have to get creative.

We also know that things are really tough right now for some people who live with mental illness. Stress and anxiety can make things worse. While we don't have all the answers, know we're sending you love and strength and our wellbeing tips below are designed to work for you however you're feeling right now. Our FAQ on our website answers some of the questions we've been receiving.

We'll be updating our website as often as we can with new information, resources and material. We're also active on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, where we'll be sharing ways to support wellbeing and asking you to share the things that are helping you get through. We hope you'll join us. He waka eke noa – we're all in this together.

Nga mihi nui,
The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

www.mentalhealth.org.nz/covid-19

Photo by Simon Williams, authenticas.org



Top tips to get through

Top tips for looking after mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19 and beyond.

Find ways to connect

Connecting with others is so important for our wellbeing and helps to make us feel safer, less stressed and less anxious. We can support each other to get through this.

Some ideas to connect include: writing emails that share a favourite memory, playing video games with mates, playing online scrabble or other board games, joining or starting a virtual book club, sharing a favourite karakia or waiata with your friends on social media, having video catch-ups with workmates, calling friends and whānau who are in self-isolation and reaching out to neighbours to ensure everyone has what they need to get through.

Find ways to take notice

Notice the beauty in the world around your home. Take time to feel the sun on your skin, breathe in fresh air whenever you can, make a list of what you're grateful for, take the time to thank someone for how they make you feel, do a mindfulness exercise on YouTube, watch the plants in your home or outside your window growing and changing with each passing day.

Find ways to be active

We know this is a tricky one without gyms or sports but it can be done! Play 'the floor is lava' with the kids, do a yoga class online, try out a new workout on YouTube, go for walks or runs outside (just stay 2m away from others!), use the cans in the pantry as weights, stretch.

Find ways to give

Give compliments, think about a skill you have you could share with your whānau/flatmates/friends, share a favourite recipe, let people know you're there to help (and tell them what help you can offer – e.g. can you pick up food for a neighbour when you go shopping? Can you help your friends' kids with their English homework via Skype?). Check in on neighbours and members of your community who may need to hear a cheery voice or need a helping hand.

Find ways to keep learning

Staying curious and engaging with the world around you is a great way to uplift your wellbeing. Pick a question you've always wondered about and take some time to look it up. Call your parents or grandparents and ask them questions about life when they were growing up. Research your whakapapa or family tree. Look up stories, myths and legends from different cultures. Discover the name of the iwi, hapu, maunga and awa of the place you live. Download an app like Duolingo and start learning a new language. Ask your tamariki/kids to teach you something they learned at school.

Spend time with nature

While staying at home doesn't mean you have to stay indoors all the time, it might feel safer for you to do so! Think about how you can connect with nature from your home. Can you bring some nature indoors? Put up pictures of maunga (mountains), whenua (land), moana (oceans) or awa (rivers) that have meaning to you. Have a chat with your pot plants (this really helps them grow!). Listen to nature sounds – birdsong is a lovely background noise while you work. Open the windows as often as you can. Take time every day to feel the sun or the wind or the rain on your skin.

Keep taking your medication

Don't stop taking any of your regular medication without first talking with your doctor. Phone or email your GP to get any new prescriptions you may need. If you're staying at home and that's throwing off your routine, set reminders to take your medicine when you need to.

If you're currently getting help with your mental health, continue with this if possible

Talk to your GP, counsellor, case worker or mental health team about how they can continue supporting you. Can your appointments take place over the phone, via email, text or video chat? What tips do they have to help you get through? Who can you call if you need help urgently? Write this down so you have it handy when you need it.