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Risk control

Maintaining Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19



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Maintaining Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be with us for some time to come. In the UK, we are experiencing local lockdowns and restrictions on our movements in a bid to slow the spread of the virus and protect our National Health Service. For many of us, the longevity of the pandemic with the reduced opportunities for social contact and interaction can take their toll on our mental health and wellbeing.

However there are a number of proactive steps we can all take to reduce these impact on us by investing in our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Read on for some useful tips and helpful advice on improving your wellbeing.

Looking after your employees

Your employees are your most precious resource and it goes without saying that you want to do everything you can to look after them in these challenging times. One of the most effective ways of looking after your employees is to help them to help themselves by actively encouraging them to focus on their own physical and mental health and wellbeing. Whilst RMP offers a range of guidance documents and training resources to assist with this through its resource pages at: <https://rmpartners.co.uk/resources/>, other guidance and advice should be considered to assist employees to help them build resilience and maintain their mental and physical wellbeing.

Looking after your health and wellbeing while at home

In the UK we have access to a vast array of resources via the National Health Service (NHS), central and local Government and charitable organisations such as MIND – who provide specific mental health advice and support.

Spending more time at home

If you are spending more time than you normally would at home then it is beneficial to keep yourself occupied and have structure to your day. Mind - the mental health charity offers the following recommendations;

- Plan a routine - write it down if needs be and try to stick to it
- Implement a good sleep regime
- Take care of your immediate environment – keep yourself, your clothing and your environment clean
- Find constructive ways to spend your time – communicate, sort things out, set daily goals
- Find ways to relax and be creative – exercise, meditate, DIY, music, art, etc.

- Keep your mind stimulated – reading, puzzles and learning.

Working from home

If you are working from home it is important to stay connected with your colleagues and retain a sense of perspective. To do so you could try the following;

- Keep in touch with colleagues - this is likely to have to be electronically but outdoor meetings may be possible where local restrictions allow.
- Plan regular catch-ups with someone you trust - Have a safe space to talk about how you're feeling
- Use Available Support – e.g. Employee Assistance programmes and helplines
- Take care with news and information – Use valid sources only and limit the frequency of exposure
- Make time for yourself where possible – Establish a work start/finish time and take regular breaks
- Remain active – move frequently, avoid sitting too long and plan in daily exercise
- Look after your physical Health – Implement good habits for sleep, hydration, diet and exercise. These are outlined in more detail below.

Sleep hygiene

Sleep is often underappreciated for all of the positive benefits it brings us and at these times of heightened uncertainty and anxiety about the future. Getting the right amount and type of sleep not only positively impacts your mood but also assists in maintaining energy levels, concentration, memory and ability to handle stress. So give yourself the best possible chances of improving your sleep hygiene by:

- Avoiding caffeine in the evening
- Avoid eating close to bedtime
- Avoid napping during the day
- Develop a sleep routine
- Go to bed and get up at the same time each day
- Creating a calm bedroom space
- Avoid watching TV in bed
- Avoid use of all electronic devices at least an hour before bed, as the screen light stimulates affects your ability to fall asleep.

Hydration

As humans we are comprised 60% water by body weight, with the recommended daily water intake through foods and fluids being 2.5 litres for men and 2 litres for women, of which 20% comes from our food. As we have no water storage within our bodies this means that we need to be constantly replacing the water we lose to help our minds and bodies work effectively. All fluids consumed count towards this but just be mindful of the sugar and caffeine these may also contain! It is recommended that we drink water regularly to replace this daily loss for the following reasons;

- To help regulate our weight
- To help regulate our body temperature
- To help our main physiological functions
- To supports a healthy immune system.

Diet

What we eat has been shown to not only influence our physical health but also our mental wellbeing. Eating the right things can not only increase your energy levels but can also improve your mood and help you think more clearly.

The following tips can help support mental and physical wellbeing;

- Eat regularly – this keeps your blood sugar levels steady and avoids any blood sugar drops that can make you feel tired, irritable and depressed
- Eat a healthy breakfast comprised of slow energy release foods as a good start to your day
- Eat smaller portions more often rather than big meals infrequently, again to regulate your blood sugar levels
- Avoid foods that make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sweets, biscuits, sugary drinks and alcohol
- Get your 5 a day – try to eat a balanced diet containing a variety of fruit and vegetables so that your body gets all the minerals and nutrients it needs to function at its best
- Getting enough protein - Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings - it also helps keep you feeling fuller for longer
- Eating the right fats - Your brain needs fatty acids (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well, so rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones. Healthy fats are found in oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs)

- Trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils should be avoided where possible – many convenience foods contain these such as cakes and biscuits. These can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat isn't good for your mood or your physical health in the long run
- Managing caffeine - Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it will give you a quick burst of energy, but then may make you feel anxious and depressed, disturb your sleep (especially if you have it before bed), or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly. Caffeine is in tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other manufactured energy drinks.
- Look after your gut - Sometimes your gut can reflect how you are feeling emotionally. If you're stressed or anxious this can make your gut slow down or speed up. For healthy digestion you need to have plenty of fibre, fluid and exercise regularly. Healthy gut foods include fruits, vegetables and wholegrains, beans, pulses, live yoghurt and other probiotics.

Exercise

Exercise comes in many forms and different types work for different people and you need to find out what works best for you and your circumstances.

For example, if you have a garden, then your normal garden maintenance also counts as a workout during lockdown.

Squatting whilst weeding and planting will strengthen your core and glutes, carrying your watering can and various tools will tone your arms and mowing the lawn is a real cardiovascular workout and great for your heart health.

Whether it is walking, running, cycling or another activity; exercising outdoors brings many benefits to your overall wellbeing as you enjoy the sunshine, breathe in the fresh air and possibly even experience some socially distanced human interaction.

However there are also many beneficial exercises that you can do inside as well, with many of these requiring little or no equipment, such as Pilates and Yoga.

Physical health web resources

A simple web search will pull up a wide range of exercises, fitness videos and fitness challenges with the NHS fitness studio offering access to a wide range of exercise and fitness resources, including videos, podcasts and printable documents. This includes the popular **couch to 5k** running programme that will take you step by step from novice to 5km runner in just 9 weeks.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/couch-to-5k-week-by-week/>

Web resources

There are many great mental health resources that you can access from the comfort of your home. They are designed to promote positive health and wellbeing:

- The NHS Live Well website is a good place to start, offering a wealth of information and guidance regarding both physical and mental health and wellbeing from a trusted source.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/>

- Mind offer a more specialised service with guidance and advice as well as offering free helplines and an online community, a safe place you can join to share and discuss how you are feeling, particularly in relation to the pandemic and its effects. Online and phone counselling with mental health professionals:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/>

No matter if you are an Apple or Android fan, or what you want to be able to do from your mobile phone - the phrase "there's an App for that" comes to mind. Most Apps are free, but be aware that many contain ads and in-app purchases. It is very much a case of finding one that works best for you.

If you're struggling with low mood or feeling more anxious, beyond what self-care can improve, then you may want to contact one of the mental health charities, visit your GP or get referred to your organisations Occupational Health Service. Many organisations have access for staff to counselling sessions or more specialised clinical services.

Some doctors are still accepting patients for face to face appointments, but many are providing care through teleconferencing or video appointments. Your GP can assist you to find a treatment provider who best suits your needs.

RMP UK has a proven track record of reducing injury costs and minimising productivity losses for UK businesses. If you want to learn more about how RMP's UK services can benefit your organisation then get in touch or access our website: <https://rmpartners.co.uk/>.

General Reference Sources

- 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>
- 2 <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/>
- 3 <https://rmpartners.co.uk/resources/>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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