Coronavirus: How to protect your mental health

Coronavirus has plunged the world into uncertainty and the constant news about the pandemic can feel relentless. All of this is taking its toll on people's mental health, particularly those already living with conditions like anxiety and OCD. So how can we protect our mental health?

Being concerned about the news is understandable, but for many people it can make existing mental health problems worse.

Limit the news and be careful what you read

- Limit the amount of time you spend reading or watching things which aren't making you feel better. Perhaps decide on a specific time to check in with the news

- There is a lot of misinformation swirling around - stay informed by sticking to trusted sources of information such as government and NHS websites

Have breaks from social media and mute things which are triggering

- Mute key words which might be triggering on Twitter and unfollow or mute accounts

- Mute WhatsApp groups and hide Facebook posts and feeds if you find them too overwhelming

Wash your hands - but not excessively

Stay connected with people

Increasing numbers will join those already in self-isolation so now might be a good time to make sure you have the right phone numbers and email addresses of the people you care about. Agree regular check-in times and feel connected to the people around you.

If you're self-isolating, strike a balance between having a routine and making sure each day has some variety.

It might end up actually feeling like quite a productive two weeks. You could work through your to-do list or read a book you'd been meaning to get to.

Avoid burnout

With weeks and months of the coronavirus pandemic ahead, it is important to have down time. Mind recommends continuing to access nature and sunlight wherever possible. Do exercise, eat well and stay hydrated.

AnxietyUK suggests practising the "Apple" technique to deal with anxiety and worries.

- **Acknowledge:** Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.
- **Pause:** Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Pause and breathe.
- **Pull back:** Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.
- **Let go:** Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.
- **Explore:** Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention.

For full article on BBC news: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799

Useful website if your child is worried https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/