

# Looking after your wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

**We know that things may feel uncertain at the moment. As a kidney patient you will be aware of the advice regarding social distancing and other precautions to keep yourself safe. But if you find yourself worrying more than usual, it might help to focus on the things you can control in your life. This leaflet gives some practical tips on managing your psychological wellbeing during this time.**

## Create a routine

Routine is particularly important when you are having a challenging time. Get dressed in the morning as you usually would. Try to create a schedule of activities that you can do throughout the day.

For example, you might decide to set a specific time each day for waking up, having breakfast, exercising and phoning a friend. Scheduling activities for the day means that you are more likely to complete them and it also helps to give the day some structure.

## Do what you enjoy

It may feel as though you cannot enjoy the activities that you are used to because you need to stay at home. Try to think about the things you can still do, such as cooking, drawing, listening to music, watching TV and chatting to friends or family on the phone or online.

Try opening windows to let in fresh air and natural sunlight and, if you can, getting out into a private outdoor space, such as a garden, terrace or balcony.

## Stay connected

Even though you cannot meet people face-to-face, you can still stay connected. Use phone calls, text messages, video calling and social media to stay in contact with your loved ones. Make time to speak with them in the same way you would if you were going to meet in person.

## Normalise your thoughts and emotions and make room for them

Worries and feelings of fear and anxiety are to be expected at this time. It is important to name them, and tell yourself that these are normal and natural responses to this abnormal situation. Acknowledge the thoughts and feelings you are having. Whether these thoughts and feelings are based in truth or not, try asking yourself if it is helpful to get caught up in these thoughts and feelings at the moment. Ask yourself how you would treat a friend if they were going through this. What might you say or do? Then, if you can, try treating yourself the same way.

## Keep moving

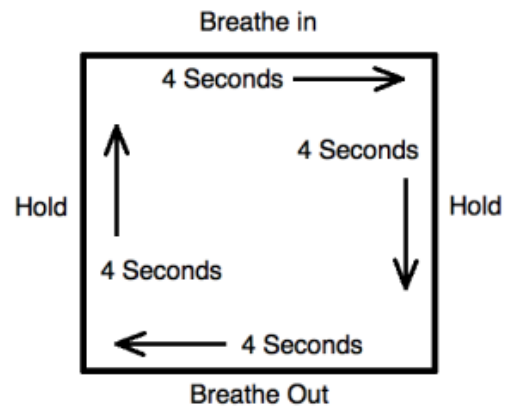
Keeping physically active is important. Move your body in a way that is safe for your current level of fitness and mobility. This might include slow-paced walking indoors or stretching.

## Let go and come back to your body and breathe

Some simple ways of doing this are:

### Box breathing

When we breathe deeply it helps us to relax. The box breathing strategy is a simple way to make sure you are breathing deeply by counting the length of your inhalations, pauses and exhalations. Follow the diagram: breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds and then hold for another 4 seconds. Continue this pattern. Practice this for 5 minutes at a time.



### Practice mindfulness

Our brains naturally look out for danger. They are drawn to thoughts about the future or past. Mindfulness helps us to focus on the 'here and now'. This is particularly important at the moment, when you may be worried about the future and the risk of catching coronavirus. There are mindfulness apps available including Calm, Headspace and Insight Timer (charges may apply), but it is possible to practice mindfulness without having them.

### Grounding

- When either standing or sitting, place your feet on the floor.
- Push them down and notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
- Notice the feeling in your legs and feet as you push down into the floor.
- Notice your whole body and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
- Now look around and notice what is around you. Notice what you can see and hear. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

## Notice meaningful moments

Noticing moments that were meaningful during your day can help you to connect with joy, feeling alive, and pleasure. At the end of each day, take time to reflect on the times that you experienced enjoyment, meaning and connection. Try and be specific and notice new things each day, for example 'I felt connected to my family when we spoke on social media' or 'I really enjoyed reading my book'. This may help you to shift your focus and attention on to the good things.

## Focus on the things that are within your control

If you are finding the news reports distressing, decide on a time of day you will listen to just one or two. It is important to make sure that when you seek information you are only using reliable sources, such as the Government and the NHS websites or the main news channels.

It is important to focus on the things in your life that you can control. Try not to worry about the things that you cannot do anything about.

<b>Within your control</b>	<b>Out of your control</b>
Attending dialysis treatment and/or hospital appointments.	Having to stay at home when not attending hospital/dialysis.
Taking your medication as prescribed and making sure you have enough.	Being in a vulnerable group.
Have necessary contact details to hand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transplant helpline, <b>t:</b> 020 7188 0549</li> <li>• CKD and dialysis helpline, <b>t:</b> 020 7188 5665</li> <li>• NHS 111, <b>t:</b> 111</li> </ul>	Appointments being cancelled or your healthcare team offering telephone appointments rather than face-to-face.
Keep up to date with recommendations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to visit the Government and NHS websites.</li> <li>• Follow the advice from your kidney team.</li> </ul>	The content of official recommendations.
Know the symptoms of coronavirus and what to do if you experience them.	The impact of the illness on others.
Take precautions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow government advice.</li> <li>• Wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap and water.</li> </ul>	Experiencing fear and anxiety, which at this time are very normal.
Look after your body: exercise, sleep, eat healthy	The availability of food in the shops.
Look after your mind: routine, do what you enjoy, stay connected, normalise emotions and thoughts, breathing, mindfulness, noticing meaningful moments.	Other people's feelings or actions.
Say no to requests to go out (other than dialysis/hospital) and ask for help from others.	Not being able to see people outside of your own household or go to the shops.
Switch off the news if you are feeling overloaded by it.	Distressing stories in the media.

### **If you need urgent emotional support:**

If your emotional distress becomes difficult to manage and you think you may harm yourself, please seek help from one of the following:

- The Samaritans, **t:** 116 123
- The NHS 111 helpline, **t:** 111, or access the online service, **w:** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)
- Your GP
- The South London and Maudsley NHS crisis support line, **t:** 0800 731 2864
- Your nearest Emergency Department (A&E).

## Useful sources of information

Guy's and St Thomas' kidney service coronavirus updates,  
**w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/kidney/overview.aspx](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/kidney/overview.aspx)

Kidney Care UK, **w:** [www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-advice/](http://www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-advice/)

NHS advice for managing your wellbeing, **w:** [www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/)

Government guidance during the pandemic, including advice on mental health and wellbeing,  
**w:** [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like further information please contact the renal psychology service, **t:** 020 7188 9770 or 020 7188 7845, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111      **w:** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

### NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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A list of sources is available on request