



Mandatory Isolation Tips

March 2022



The following isolation tips are evidence-based strategies used by our Mind HK staff during the hotel quarantine period, and adapted to Mandatory Isolation (MI) conditions. These tips are meant to help make the difficult days more manageable.

Preparing your mind

Just like with any other challenge, preparation can help you to manage and cope better. Taking care of our mental health prior to MI is key. Reflect on how you are doing right now and what positive coping strategies you can start using (e.g. exercise, connecting with friends and family, picking up a hobby). If you feel overwhelmed and feel like you are struggling, this is a good time to seek help.

Helpful Tips:

- Complete our [COVID-19 Self-Help Guide](#), a self-directed workbook that will take you through exercises and tips on managing your mental health during this difficult time
- If you feel like you need further support and that speaking with someone will be helpful, [here](#) is a list of services, hotlines and online support you can reach out to. You can also check out our [Community Directory](#) for a list of community organisations offering other support services. Alternatively, you can reach out to private providers as well.
- **Prepare a well-being plan**, listing actions you can take when you feel like you are struggling
 - Whom can you call when you are struggling (e.g. friends, family, therapist)
 - What activities help you manage stress (e.g. exercise, dancing, writing, drawing)
 - What positive target coping strategies can you use (e.g. mindfulness, meditation, journaling)



Set for Success!

Like everything else in life, it is all about preparation. Gather some essentials that you anticipate you may need if you are required to go into an isolation facility, stock these items in your home so that you have them on hand. If you take comfort in preparation, you can pre-pack or put together a list of what you will take with you.

Some ideas for items to bring:

- Clean clothes to change
- Electronics, or any equipment you may need to work: Wifi egg, power bank, cables
- Fun activities - art or craft supplies, books
- Comforts from home - blanket, pillow, bedding, towels
- Toiletries - face wash, body wash, shampoo, conditioner, body and face moisturiser

Move-in day



Unpack and get your room organised, finding space to put your luggage away, this will just make it feel a little more like home and will help to declutter your space. Studies have shown that people who maintain a clean living environment are healthier and more active. Additionally, a cluttered room distracts our visual field, making it more difficult to focus and complete tasks.

You want to avoid working, or spending all your time in bed if you can, as this can impact your sleep routine. The next few days will be about keeping your space organised and functional. Our spaces impact our outlook and our frame of mind.

Helpful Tips:

- **Set up “zones”**, like a work space and workout area, leaving your bed for sleeping and relaxing if space allows for it
- **Unpack and get your belongings organised**
- **Move furniture to suit your needs**, if you are able to
- **Keep your room clean and organised**. Set a regular cleaning time, which will help you feel fresh and productive.



We are what we eat

A healthy well balanced diet can impact both our physical and mental health. You will not have much choice or control over your meals, therefore, finding ways to eat healthily will be key.



Helpful Tips:

- Prior to being taken to isolation, **pack fresh fruits and vegetables**
 - **Pack healthy snacks that will store well**, like nuts and popcorn
 - **Don't forget to pack some treats** - having treats as part of a balanced diet can actually help us stick to a healthy eating routine, and fosters a healthier relationship with food
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Dry isolation?

Alcohol is a depressant and can worsen low-mood, and can contribute to impulsive behaviour. Alcohol is not permitted in government facilities, so prepare for a dry isolation.

If you have a history of struggling with alcohol use, this is the time to use the coping strategies in your tool box (see helpful tips below). If you are currently struggling with alcohol use, it would be a good idea to connect with a healthcare professional (GP/Family Doctor/Nurse Practitioner) to discuss safety strategies while in isolation, as abrupt detoxification can have negative health impacts.

Helpful Tips:

- Connect with your sponsor or support person regularly
- Connect with your supportive community
- Connect with your therapist or use the crisis hotline (see provided list)
- **Positive self-talk** that you would use in risky situations, i.e., "I can do this. I have done it before"
- **Have a coping strategy plan**



Supporting resources

- AA Hong Kong: <https://www.aa-hk.org>
- Tung Wah Groups of Hospitals:
<http://atp.tungwahcsd.org>

It's all about the routine

MI can feel like a time-black hole, where hours and days blend together, and this can negatively impact our mental health. Routines help us create structure, they help us keep track of how we are doing and give us a sense of accomplishment. Routines have been shown to reduce our stress levels and contribute to improved sleep.



Helpful Tips:

- **Maintain your morning routines** like you would any other day, showering, changing and eating breakfast
- **Change into “day-time” clothes;** Our clothes have a major impact on our mindset and perception, so changing out of your PJs will help signal the start of your day
- **Set daily “to-do” goals.** If you are working or studying this will be easy enough. If you have neither, consider signing up for a free online course, or if you have art or craft supplies, or books, set daily activity goals
- **Be sure to carve up time for breaks,** particularly if you are working or studying, and use your dinner to signal the end of the “work/school” day
- **Remember to schedule some time to move**
- If you can, try to include some activities in your routine that give you a **regular sense of pleasure, achievement or mastery** (these can be small tasks like paying bills or tidying your e-mail inbox, or creative pursuits like doing art or listening to music). These experiences are crucial in maintaining a healthy mood.
- Similarly, setting aside some time each day to do a **mindfulness exercise** can help in maintaining balance, there are lots of great mindfulness apps to help you stay on track.

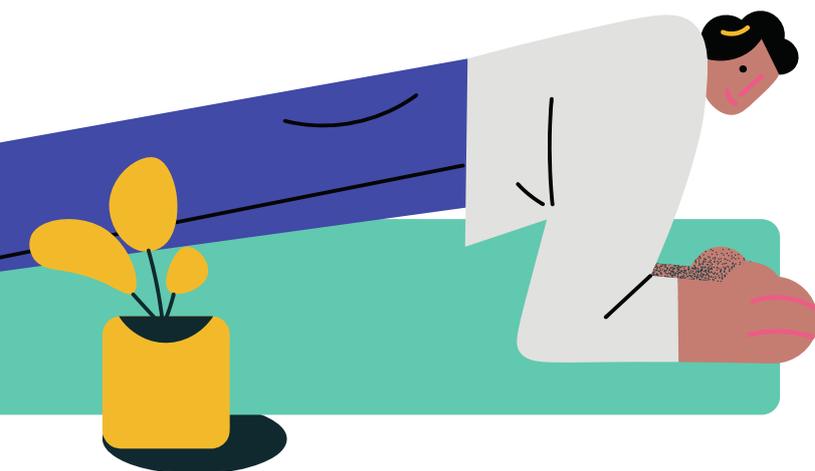
Exercise

One of the worst things about MI, especially when we are confined in small spaces, is the lack of physical movement. Physical activity has been shown to not only prevent mental health problems but also to be an effective treatment of depression and anxiety. MI is a stressful situation that can be anxiety-provoking as well as isolating, and physical activity is an effective way to combat these negative impacts. Carve out time every day to move, this can be stretching, yoga, or even dancing!

Helpful Tips:

- **Pack workout equipment** like a yoga mat or resistance bands
- **Include regular exercise into your daily routine.** Consider carving out two physical activity sessions, one for a more vigorous workout, and one for low impact activity like yoga
- **Remember exercise does not require equipment!** There are plenty of free exercise apps and videos on social media to guide you

Indoor workout resources



- [Home workouts with lululemon Ambassadors](#)
- [Calibrate x Move it for Mental Health Home Workout](#)

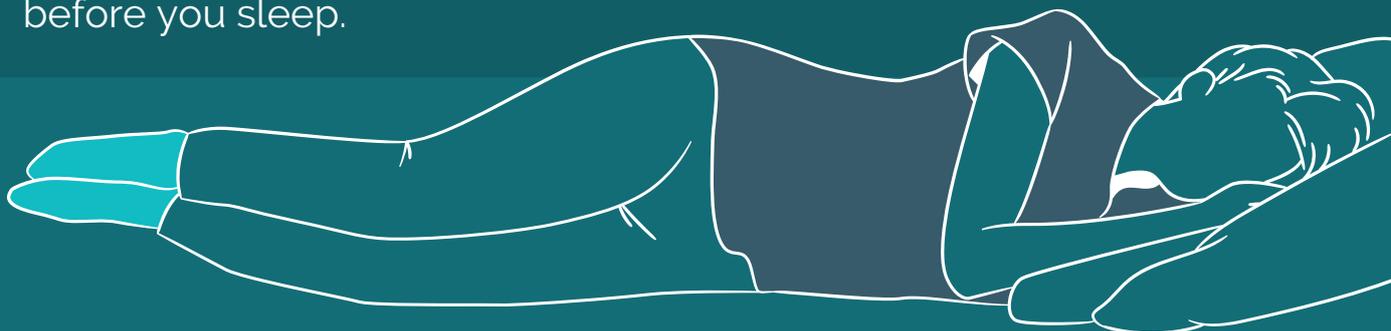
Learn more about exercise and mental health [here](#).

Sleep

Disturbed sleep can negatively affect our mental health and mental health struggles can negatively affect our sleep. During REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, our dream state has been shown to improve learning, help consolidate memory and contribute to improved emotional health. Sleep is part of our daily routine, and when we are put into a situation where our routines are disrupted this can negatively impact our sleep. Additionally, increased stress can also disrupt our sleep.

Helpful Tips:

- **Stick to your set routine throughout the day**
- **Wake up and go to sleep at consistent times everyday**, with flexibility on the weekend
- **Keep your bed for sleeping and relaxing**, and use a working zone outside of bed, if this is available to you
- **Pack a white noise sound machine**, or find apps/audio on your phone for white noise, if you find it helpful
- **Avoid using screens or reading the news before bedtime**
- **Use mindfulness and meditation** to help you get into a restful state
- **Stay active** - being physically active and exercising can improve your sleep. But remember not to do vigorous exercise right before you sleep.



Everybody's working for the weekend!

Breaks are important to help us recharge and reset, so take the weekend to indulge yourself. This will also help you set structure to your week.

Helpful Tips:

- **Allow yourself to let go into the weekend doing things you enjoy and shutting off from work if possible**
- **This is your cheat time** - eat fun food, guilt-free binge watch a show
- **Don't forget to move your body on the weekends as well**

Stay connected

MI is very isolating. We are social creatures and need human connection to maintain positive mental health. Our loved ones can be a source of support and laughter, two very important commodities during this challenging time.



Helpful Tips:

- **Set up virtual get-togethers with friends or family**
- **Ensure you are connecting with your support system regularly**
- **If you have professional support, talk to them about moving your sessions online** (many have done this already)
- If you feel you need professional support, know that most therapy services have moved online because of social distancing **so it is easier now to set up online support sessions**



Keeping the peace with your roommates

If you are in MI with family members, partners or friends this can be a two-edged sword. Having company is definitely far less isolating, but when we are confined in small spaces it can take its toll as well. High-stress situations like these can put significant strain on relationships and worsen our own stress levels.

Alternatively, in some cases, you may be placed in shared facilities with strangers. Remember that this is a challenging situation for everyone, so being kind to others and yourself will be key. You can take this opportunity to get to know new people if you are up to it. But don't force it on yourself. It's ok to keep to yourself and connect with your support network.

Helpful Tips:

- **Set up a work or study schedule**, if possible, to avoid conflicts - this will help control the noise level in the room
- **Be kind to each other, and be kind to yourself**
- **Let the small things go and pick your battles.** If you are ever in doubt, ask yourself "will I care about this in 5 hours? Will I care about this tomorrow?"
- **Have quiet time where you engage in activities on your own**, like reading or listening to a podcast
- **Take advantage of this forced closeness and carve out time to connect.** Physical proximity is not the same as emotional connection. If you are quarantining with your partner, have a "date night". If you are with your family, play board games as a way to unwind.



Be kind

These are challenging times for everyone - your isolation neighbours, facility staff, government and testing staff as well as healthcare workers. In the face of increased pressure we may find ourselves less patient and more irritable. **However, this should not cancel out your own kindness and compassion.** Studies have shown that happy people engage in more acts of kindness on a regular basis. Acts of kindness can come in all forms and sizes, and since you are confined physically these acts will be limited to what you can do from your isolation base. And do not forget to be kind to yourself!



Helpful Tips:

- **Take time to engage in an act of kindness every day** - giving advice or support, paying a compliment, saying thank you, reaching out to someone who is struggling, sending a gift to someone in need
- If you feel yourself getting frustrated or you're in a situation where your emotions or behaviours are escalating, **take a deep breath and pause before you do anything else**
- **If you do have an outburst, which can happen, apologise to the person on the receiving end**, explaining to them that you are frustrated with the situation, not with them personally. Remember to be compassionate to others
- **Remember, isolation is incredibly hard on you.** If you find yourself being more impatient or less tolerant than usual, don't beat yourself up about this. Ask yourself - "what would I say to a friend if they were in my situation?"

Count your blessings

Gratitude and acknowledging everything that you have to be grateful for has a big impact on our outlook. One study found that individuals who engaged in regular gratitude journaling were more optimistic and had a more positive outlook on their lives, compared to those who journaled their irritations. Interestingly, those in the gratitude group were also found to be more active.

Helpful Tips

- Reflect on what you have to be grateful for everyday; keeping a gratitude journal during this time can be helpful (there are some great grateful journaling apps to keep you on track)



Remember:

Not everything is going to go perfectly well and that is ok!
This is an incredibly challenging situation, and it is important to recognise that.

Managing Crisis

If you are feeling overwhelmed and unsafe (feelings of harming yourself), please seek help right away.

Even in isolation you can call:

- Emergency services 999
- Hong Kong Samaritans 24hr Hotline: 2896 0000
- Suicide Prevention Services 24hr Hotline: 2382 0000
- Suicide Prevention Services (Elderly) 24hr Hotline: 2382 0881
- Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre 24hr Hotline: 18288
- Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service (Adult) 24hr Hotline w social worker: 2535 4135

Available online services:

HKU Department of Psychiatry - Headwind online support service

Service registration:

hku.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AnA4YnCgqhUyup

Open up - Online supporting services

24-hour online supporting services for individuals aged 35 or below

Facebook/ Instagram/ Wechat: hkopenup

Link: <https://www.openup.hk/index.htm?lang=en>

[Click here](#) for a list of additional mental health resources and support available.

About Mind HK

Mind HK (Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited) is a S88 registered charity (91/16471), which launched in 2017. Our vision is to ensure no one in Hong Kong has to face a mental health problem alone. Through resources, training, and outreach campaigns and programmes, we help to educate around mental health and remove the associate stigma, with the aim of achieving the best mental health for all in Hong Kong. With existing collaboration and research efforts, we are here to support Hong Kong in becoming a global leader and regional model for public mental health. For more on our work, mission and vision, please visit www.mind.org.hk.

Useful Resources

If you want to learn more about other mental health topics, please visit our **Mental Health A to Z:**

www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/

COVID-19 resources:

- [COVID-19 Mental Health Tips](#)
- [Tips on Managing Quarantine](#)
- [Pandemic Fatigue](#)
- [Mental Health Resources for Domestic Workers](#)

If you are in an emergency or crisis situation, please contact 999, or go to your nearest A&E.

More local urgent support in Hong Kong:

mind.org.hk/find-help-now

More non-urgent support can be found here:

mind.org.hk/community-directory/

How & where to seek help in Hong Kong:

mind.org.hk/getting-help/



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