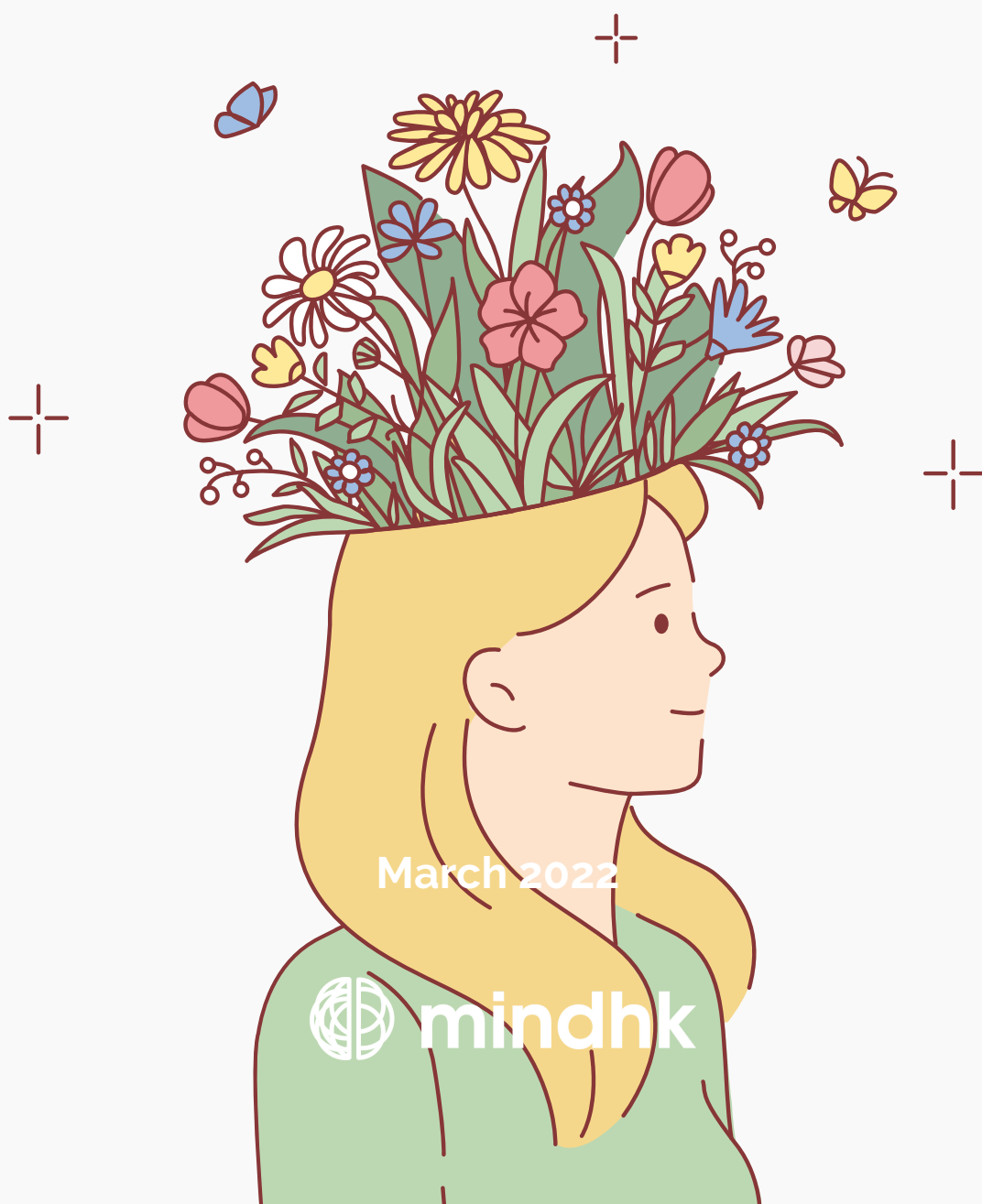


Managing Mental Wellbeing During COVID-19



March 2022



mindhk

In this resource, you will find information on the below:

- Taking care of your mental wellbeing
- Managing increasing anxiety
- The role of social media and the news
- Feelings of loneliness
- Feeling "meh"
- Pandemic fatigue



Taking care of your mental wellbeing

Across Hong Kong and the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has left many feeling the effects of the pandemic.

- **Recognise and acknowledge your emotions.** It is normal to feel overwhelmed, given the uncertainty and mass impact of the pandemic on our daily lives. You are not alone. Recognise your feelings and emotions and acknowledge their impact on your everyday life.
- **Maintain a healthy routine and look after your physical health.** Get enough sleep, eat regular nutritious meals and try to do some physical activity, if you are able to. This is especially important if you are currently working remotely or off work or school.
- **Connect with others.** Schedule in some time to connect with your loved ones, even if it's virtual. Avoid just chatting about COVID and the current situation, check in with how they have been, be present and enjoy the quality time spent together.





- **Keep active/Keep moving.** If you are able to, try to move your body each day, even if you are indoors, as exercise helps to elevate your mood and lower stress. Learn more about the benefits of exercise to our physical and mental health [here](#).
- **Learn to manage any feelings linked to uncertainty**
 - Try to separate what is in your control and what is out of your control
 - List and then act on the things that you do have control over. These could include what you eat and drink, the routine you set in your day, the number of hours you work or study, the steps you take, etc.
- **Try some breathing and mindfulness exercises to help you relax**
- Incorporate an activity from each of the **“5 ways to wellbeing”** (Give, Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning) into your day. Click [here](#) to learn more about this.



Managing increasing anxiety

At some points you may notice an increase in your anxiety. This could be due to an external factor (like hearing some news, or learning of a friend or family member who has tested positive) or an internal factor (like feeling very stuck in the situation).

Signs that we might be becoming overwhelmed by anxiety

- Noticing your mind being overly preoccupied by stressful events (like how the pandemic is affecting our lives)
- Becoming much more sensitive towards news or information regarding to the situation
- Having trouble staying focused and/or concentrating on work
- Having trouble falling asleep or feeling restless
- Shallow breathing, faster heartbeat, other physical symptoms
- Constantly checking social media or news sources for information



At this point in time, you can try the following things to quickly bring your anxiety level down:

- **Use any methods you have available to soothe yourself:**

Examples include:

- Taking a hot shower or bath
- Listening to calming music
- Using an app to go through a guided meditation
- Talking to a friend or family member who is able to reassure you

- **Ground yourself by:**

- Breathing slowly and focussing on your breath
- Listening to sounds around you
- Walking barefoot
- Wrapping yourself in a blanket and feeling it around you
- Touching something or sniffing something with a strong smell
- Focusing on the sensations you are feeling right now. You might find it helpful to keep a box of things with different textures and smells (for example perfume, a blanket and some smooth stones) ready for when you need it.
- Try to keep you present in the face of the strong feelings. Techniques like **"dropping anchor"** may be helpful. This will not make the feelings go away, but it may help you to "weather the storm" until the strong feelings pass (and remember, the feelings will pass).

- Seek help: If the feelings of overwhelming anxiety do not feel manageable, reach out to a friend or loved one, or seek professional advice from services listed **here**.

Learn more about anxiety **here**.



The role of social media and the news

The pandemic has become a huge part of our lives and has affected every facet of our daily lives. Because of this, social media and the news are inundated with information, updates and commentaries on the current situation, which can lead to increased anxiety.

While staying updated with the newest guidelines is helpful for us to plan our next steps, being constantly bombarded with related information can be overwhelming and stressful. Unverified information and fear-mongering news on the internet, on social media, and in the press, can also contribute to a sense of panic amongst the general public. The additional stress and worry from being constantly hearing the news can take a toll on our mental health. As our mental health can greatly affect our overall physical health, the more stressed and anxious we become by reading such news stories, the potentially more vulnerable we are towards becoming physically ill.

Take a break / Switch off from the news

- Avoid excessively checking social media and the news
- Distract yourself from what's going on to give yourself a break
- Try moving key apps away from the home-screen of your phone for a while
- Turn off notifications from key apps
- Engage in an alternative and enjoyable activities instead



Loneliness

With the stringent restrictions around social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine, remote working/school, and social gatherings, your day-to-day social interactions may have been reduced significantly. For some people, feelings of loneliness may develop as a result. As social beings, most of us feel the need for social interaction and relationships. Loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for social interaction is not fulfilled.

Loneliness and isolation can have a significant impact on mental health. It can contribute to mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. It is therefore really important to learn to recognise these feelings early, particularly as we are being advised to limit our social contact with others.

Managing feelings of loneliness

One way to overcome loneliness is to increase the level of social contact with others; There are different ways to do this, despite the fact that we aren't able to go out as much.

- **Get creative in connecting with others virtually.** Text them, schedule time for a call or Face-time. You can also schedule in online activities together, such as group streaming, online video games, etc.
- **Check in with friends and family.** Send a text to people you care about and check in with them, connect with people you haven't met for a long time is a great way to show that you care and make their day - a great way to remind yourself that you matter to someone else.
- If you have a pet at home, **spending some quality time with your pet** can help significantly reduce your feelings of loneliness.

- **Learn to spend time alone.** Given the current situation, it is understandable if the people around you are generally wanting to minimise their social contact, which perhaps makes it really difficult to increase your social interactions. It may therefore be worth learning how to make the best of being alone and how to feel comfortable in your own company.
 - **Block out time for yourself.** Reserve me-time for yourself to focus on an activity without any distractions, no matter how long it is. Block out any notifications or minimise the chance of being distracted by something else, and fully immerse yourself into the activity.
 - **Spending time alone can be rewarding.** Being on your own gives you a chance to do something that you enjoy or are interested in. This could be anything, from cooking, playing puzzles, gaming, etc. Actively engaging in the activity and enjoying the joy it brings can be a positive experience.
 - **Let it sink for a moment.** Learning to be alone can be hard and may involve facing difficult feelings, especially when you are not used to being alone. However, it also gives you some time to reflect and process on what is happening and how it affects your life, thoughts and feelings. This can be a helpful process for you to organise and take practical steps to manage your situation.



Feeling 'meh'

The pandemic has also disrupted our plans for the future, and at times we may feel like we have been stuck for a long time - even though the current situation has been changing. Feeling 'meh', numb and hollow, or stagnated can be some of the signs of being in a state of **'languishing'**. Originally coined by a sociologist, Corey Keyes, it describes **a state of stagnation and emptiness - where you are not in a poor mental health state, but definitely not thriving.**

Languishing is not a diagnosable mental health problem, but it can impede our motivation and diminish our interest in things, and increase our risk of developing a mental health problem if not properly managed.



Signs of Languishing

- Unable to articulate your emotion and feelings
- Feeling stagnated and stuck
- Feeling empty, numb and hollow
- Feeling apathetic
- Feeling the absence of good mental wellbeing
- Lacking motivation and anticipation
- Having a hard time focusing and being productive
- Lacking active engagement in what you are doing





Combat Languishing

There are no set rules and recommendations on how to combat languishing, but here are some ideas on how to get started.

- **Acknowledge your emotions.** Acknowledging how you feel may not make the feeling go away, but it helps you to put labels on how you feel to help you take practical steps to manage the feeling.
- **Celebrate small achievements.** Achieving a goal improves our sense of mastery and self-efficacy, which combats the feeling of stagnation and stuckness that we experience when we are in a state of languishing.
- **Doing random acts of kindness.** A random act of kindness, no matter big or small, matters. It is a great way to connect with others as you attend to others' needs. It is also a great reminder for yourself that you can matter to someone else, even in tiny ways.
- **Talk to someone about how you're feeling.** Talking to someone you trust about how you feel allows you to put things in perspective and organise your thoughts. Connecting with someone on an emotional level also strengthens your relationship with them, fostering the supportive relationships you need to get through these difficult times.
- **Actively make time to engage in activities that bring you joy.** This could be anything, no matter how complex or simple. Actively engaging in an activity you enjoy, and focusing on the experience and how it makes you feel, is a great way to combat feeling numb and apathetic.



Pandemic fatigue

Pandemic fatigue is defined as “demotivation to follow recommended protective behaviours, emerging gradually over time and affected by a number of emotions, experiences and perception” (World Health Organisation, 2020). It is an understandable and natural reaction to the seemingly endless stringent measures. You may consider it as a kind of burnout or chronic stress during a prolonged public health crisis; when the preventive measures to tackle the pandemic disrupt all aspects of our lives.

Learn more about how to combat pandemic fatigue:

<https://www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/covid-19/pandemic-fatigue/>

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](#)
- [Mandatory Isolation Tips](#)
- [Pandemic Fatigue](#)
- [COVID-19 self-help guide](#)

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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