



# **Coping with Coronavirus: Advice for ICU Health Care Staff**

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This advice is for any member of ICU Health Care Staff dealing with Coronavirus.

## **1 You are a valued and important member of the team. We value the work that you do and the efforts that you go to do a good job. Thank you.**

Many health workers are likely to feel stressed and under enormous pressure during this outbreak – this is a perfectly normal and indeed is a normal reaction to a very abnormal set of circumstances. But feeling and admitting the stress you are under isn't a sign of weakness, nor is it a reflection that you cannot do your job. Managing your mental health and psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health.

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## **2 Take care of yourself at this time, keep connected to those who are close to you.**

Try and use helpful coping strategies such as ensuring sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts, eating healthy food and engaging in physical activity. Talk to your colleagues about what is concerning you and ask for their help if you need it. We often talk about what is not going so well, remember to note and to mention acts of kindness or great skill, we all need positive feedback, particularly when the situation you face every day is so challenging.

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## **3 This is going to be a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses before.**

The stress-management strategies you found which worked for you in the past may no longer be possible now, but you can adapt to find other ways to unwind. You are the most likely person to know what de-stresses you and you should not be hesitant in using these techniques to keep yourself psychologically well. This is not a sprint; it's a marathon.

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## **4 Unfortunately some healthcare workers may feel more isolated as people avoid contact due to fear of infection.**

This can be distressing for the individual and can make an already challenging situation far worse. If it does happen consider using digital methods to maintain contact with your social/support network. Also speak to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for social support - your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you and colleague peer support is a valuable tool to support your resilience in the face of stress and distress.

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## **5 Protecting ourselves from chronic stress and poor mental health where possible during this response means that we will be functional and operate more effectively in our working roles.**

This challenging period will go on for some time and we all need to focus on longer term occupational capacity rather than repeated short-term crisis responses. Allowing yourself the time to rest and re-charge so that you can keep performing well in your job role will be the most helpful long-term response for your colleagues and the wider health system.

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## **6 Your organisation will try to ensure good quality communication and accurate information updates are available for all staff.**

To support effective coping workers should regularly rotate from higher-stress to lower-stress functions and where possible we should partner less experienced workers with their more experienced colleagues. The buddy system helps to provide support, monitor stress and reinforce safety procedures. Ensure we build in time so we can provide social support to each other.

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## **7 Remember**

We will need to ensure we can always provide flexible schedules for our colleagues to take time off should they or their family be impacted by a stressful event, or for example to care for family members.

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## **8 Seek news and information only from trusted sources.**

The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried, confused, and overwhelmed. Get the facts, not the rumours and misinformation. Facts can help to minimise fears.

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## **9 If you or a colleague falls ill, or is required to self-isolate this can be a difficult time.**

Equally staff who are shifted from their normal place of work (perhaps due to their own health risk) can have feelings of shame or guilt as they may feel they are letting their colleagues down. It is important to remember that we all remain colleagues. Keeping in mind that we will all be needed, can contribute and keeping in contact with those within our team (either as colleague or manager) is helpful.

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## **10 In summary, you will be in the best place to recognise your limits, so if you are feeling overwhelmed or distressed, please follow the advice below.**

You may also be very well placed to notice changes in your colleagues, perhaps you can check in with them and point out sources of support.

## Selfcare is often summarised as:

### **A** | **Awareness of your own responses and how this might be varying from your usual**

Most responses to stress are normal human reactions to abnormal events, but the below image is useful to indicate when you might benefit from additional support

### **B** | **Balance**

This is trying to get some time away from high pressure roles and time completely away from your role. In that time, being able to engage in your usual routines for managing stress i.e. going for a walk/run, spending time outdoors or engaged in other activities.

### **C** | **Connection**

Evidence suggests that social connectedness is our best buffer against stress. The current situation means we need to think creatively about how to maintain social connectedness, but take opportunities to connect with colleagues, your social networks and your organisational supports.

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Both the ICS / AAGBI / RCoA and RCEM have excellent regularly updated web pages with links to the latest government guidance:

⊕ <https://icmanaesthesiacovid-19.org/>

⊕ [https://www.rcem.ac.uk/RCEM/Quality\\_Policy/Safety/Covid-19/RCEM/ForProfessionals/Safety/Coronavirus\\_Covid-19.aspx?hkey=a595bd96-c54f-42ab-a399-21ac96c4c3b9](https://www.rcem.ac.uk/RCEM/Quality_Policy/Safety/Covid-19/RCEM/ForProfessionals/Safety/Coronavirus_Covid-19.aspx?hkey=a595bd96-c54f-42ab-a399-21ac96c4c3b9)

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In addition, the Mental Health Foundation and Intensive Care Society have pulled together a number of resources which you may find helpful:

⊕ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

⊕ <https://www.ics.ac.uk/ICS/Education/Wellbeing/ICS/Wellbeing.aspx?hkey=92348f51-a875-4d87-8ae4-245707878a5c>

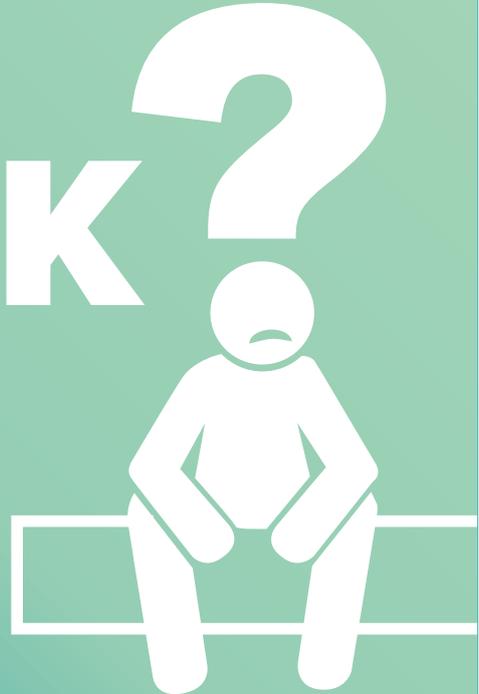
The Intensive Care Society has some great resources and posters about coping with coronavirus as a professional and also ways you can look after yourself.

It's really important to check in with yourself and check if you are ok:

# AM I OK?

1

Do you regularly feel **DISCONNECTED** from the relationship of caring for the patient, family, and colleagues?



2

Do you regularly feel **EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION** - like you have nothing left to give?

3

Do you regularly feel **A LACK OF FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT** or feeling **INEFFECTIVE** in what you do?



If you answered **YES** to all three, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work.

You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.

 intensive care society | 

proud to be the voice of critical care since 1970

Author: Dr Julie Highfield, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Cardiff Critical Care

[www.ics.ac.uk](http://www.ics.ac.uk)

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## **If you are struggling here are some apps, websites and online therapies you can also access yourself:**

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General Self Help about managing your own mental health and sleep:

- + <https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing>
  - + <http://mentalhealthsupport.co.uk/ns/>
- 

On line self-help programs you can access to help support your mental health and sleep:

- + <https://www.sleepio.com/>
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Other useful links:

- + <https://breathingspace.scot/>
- + <https://www.nhs24.scot/>

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## Useful Apps:

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**Mind Shift** is a mental health app designed specifically for teens and young adults with anxiety. Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations.



**Self Help for Anxiety Management** might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time, and learn 25 different self-help techniques. You can also use SAM's "Social Cloud" feature to confidentially connect with other users in an online community for additional support.



**Happify**, Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts.



The **Headspace** app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus. The app also has a handy "get some headspace" reminder to encourage you to keep practicing each day.



**Calm** provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music. This app is truly universal; whether you've never tried meditation before or regularly practice, you'll find the perfect program for you.



**Smiling Mind** is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. Smiling Mind is a unique tool developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life. This is really helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.

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There are many other apps you could try which could be helpful; you might find your own that you like better. You can find a list of mental health apps recommended by the NHS [here](#).

There are also many organisations that can provide support which you might find helpful.

### CORONAVIRUS ISOLATION PSYCHOLOGICAL ADVICE (19th MARCH 2020):

- Dr Lynne Taylor, Director of Psychology NHS Grampian
- Mr James Anderson Consultant Clinical Psychologist Clinical Lead North of Scotland Trauma Network

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