



Support to Clear Your Head

Advice to help you find ways to cope if you're at highest risk from Covid

Over the past year and a half, we've heard a lot from people at highest risk about the mental health impacts of being asked to shield, and the move away from shielding. Many people have been feeling lonely and isolated, and might now be finding it hard to get back to doing the things they did before Covid. You may be feeling worried or down. And you might never have felt this way before.

We have some advice to help you try to deal with any mental health issues you might be struggling with, and to let you know how to get support when you need it.

Set boundaries

As we all get used to life with fewer rules, everyone will have different things they're comfortable or uncomfortable with. Letting friends and family know what yours are in advance could make it easier to meet up. You might want to meet only outdoors, avoid hugging, or set a time limit. Or you might prefer others to wear a face covering when they're near you. The more you tell people what works for you, the less worried you're likely to feel.

Take Covid tests

You and any other adults you live with can take Covid lateral flow tests a couple of times a week. You can take these tests at home quickly and easily. If you need extra reassurance before meeting up with someone, it's worth asking them to take a test and letting you know the result too. You can order free lateral flow tests at www.gov.scot/communitytesting or ask for them in your local pharmacy.

Plan ahead

Ease anxiety about going outside by making a plan for what you'll do when you leave the house. Many shops and businesses have taken steps to keep you safe. It might make you feel more confident to phone or visit the websites of places you'll be visiting before you head out.

Come prepared

When you head out, bring everything you might need to feel more comfortable. Small things can make a big difference – like making sure you have hand sanitiser or wipes, and spare face coverings. Bringing things from home that you might need for the day – like drinks or snacks – means you won't need to go into shops or cafes if that's something you're not ready for.

Protect yourself

If the people you spend lots of time with get both doses of their Covid vaccine, it makes it less likely they'll pass Covid to you. Encourage people close to you and who are eligible for the vaccine to get vaccinated for their peace of mind and yours. They can find their nearest vaccination drop-in clinic at www.nhsinform.scot/vaccinedropinclinics If you're worried about getting the vaccine yourself, you can speak with your clinician or special nurse or GP.

Move a bit more every day

We often feel sluggish simply from a lack of movement. Do what you can to keep your body moving, like walking up and down stairs, putting the radio on and dancing, gardening or taking part in an exercise or movement class. If you're worried about safety, you could start with an online class.

Get outside

Get outside if you can. Just being in the open air can really make you feel better, and contact with nature is known to boost your mood. It's important to take things at a pace you're comfortable with. If you can, try going for a short walk first. Going further each time you go out could help you get used to things opening up.



Eat well

Eating well and giving your body the nutrients it needs will help you feel better overall – and that can extend to your mind and emotions, too. Find tips about eating well at www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living

Stay hydrated

Your body and mind need fluids to work properly, so keep yourself topped up throughout the day – especially if you notice any signs of dehydration such as feeling hungry, tired, light-headed, dizzy or have dry lips.

Sleep well

Sleep is important for everyone's mental health. Help your body clock to keep on track by trying to stick to a sleep routine, even at the weekends. Vigorous exercise, screen time and reading negative news stories are all best avoided in the run-up to bedtime as they can make it harder to nod off.

Get support

Talk to others

Many of us have been feeling more isolated during the pandemic. Contact with others can lighten our emotional load and boost our mood. If you've got used to video chatting or phone calls, keeping these going can be a good option if you'd prefer to avoid seeing people in person for now. But meeting outdoors, or in well-ventilated indoor spaces means you can see people in person now.

Not everyone has someone they can talk to regularly. Your local council can put you in touch with volunteer services who can help. Call the National Assistance Helpline on 0800 111 4000 (Monday-Friday, office hours).



Useful contacts

If you're struggling, remember you can always talk to your GP or someone in your clinical team – like your physiotherapist, or a podiatrist or specialist nurse, if you have one.

These free national phonelines are also there to help:

- **NHS 24**
Call 111 for urgent support if you are in mental distress. Open 24 hours a day.
- **Breathing Space**
Call 0800 83 85 87 to talk in confidence if you are experiencing anxiety, depression or low mood. Open Monday to Thursday: 6pm - 2am and Friday to Monday: 6pm - 6am.
- **Samaritans**
Call 116 123 for confidential emotional support if you are in distress or despair. Open 24 hours a day.
- **British Red Cross Coronavirus Helpline**
Call 0808 196 3651 if you are feeling lonely, worried, or are having difficulty accessing food or medication. Support is available in more than 200 languages. Open every day from 10am - 6pm.

Scottish Association for Mental Health

You can also find resources and mental health support on the Scottish Association for Mental Health website: www.samh.org.uk

More advice

For more information to help you cope as restrictions ease and for advice on how you can support other people who you think might be struggling, visit www.clearyourhead.scot

