

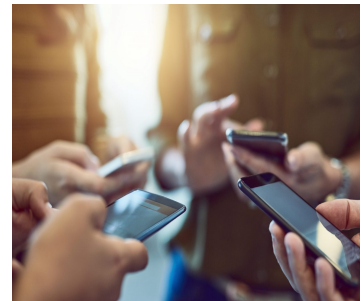
My top 5 ways to stay mentally healthy in isolation

Let's be honest - Isolation kinda sucks. I think it's harder this time because the first time everything was new and different, there was almost a sense of adventure to it all. But this time, well for me personally, even as an introvert, it seems longer, and greyer, and more lonely.

And for some of you, you may thrive on the online learning platform. For some others, it's just ok, some may also find it tricky, or limiting, or challenging. Not going out or seeing all our friends could also be getting us down.

If you are finding it hard, I want you to know that you are not alone! You have many people around you that care for your wellbeing and want to support you - friends or family included. Your teachers and support staff here at school are available to help you with managing your learning, and there are many wellbeing supports here at school too such as Anna (Counsellor) and I, and your year advisors. But if you need to talk to someone outside of your situation, or if its at 2 in the morning you may want to try some of these numbers below:

- [Kids Helpline](#) (ages 5 to 25) — call 1800 55 1800
- [Beyond Blue](#) — call 1300 22 4636
- [headspace](#) (ages 12 to 25) — call 1800 650 890
- [ReachOut.com](#) (youth mental health service)
- [MensLine Australia](#) (men only) — call 1300 78 99 78
- [SANE Australia](#) — call 1800 18 7263
- [Lifeline](#) — call 13 11 14
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) — call 1300 659 467



But there are some great things about isolation too: isolation can boost our creativity and productivity, we stay safe and well, we may enjoy more time with our family, we are able to disengage from pressures, social media and constant stimulation. We can binge watch netflix, we have time to complete projects, people are exercising more, we've learnt how to shop online, in fact our online literacy has increased (eg zoom/teams), we are learning new skills like baking or knitting, we can hear and see more of nature around us, pollution levels have gone down, we can develop a deeper sense of appreciation for our relationships and our environment, as as we have more time for self reflection, we can prioritise ourselves and become more self-reliant and build our resilience.

As a counsellor, there is one major thing that I am passionate about - WELLBEING. And over these next fe weeks, I will be sharing some ideas, links, videos and so on that may help your wellbeing during online learning and hopefully some things that will become useful tools for your lifetime.

My top 5 ways to stay mentally healthy in isolation

1 Sunlight and Nature

Nothing beats being outside. The sunshine is great for boosting your serotonin levels (which boosts mood and can help fight off depression and anxiety), vitamin D levels, better regulate your natural circadian rhythms including production of your sleep hormone (melatonin) resulting in better sleep. And it also is great for your body: building bone strength, reducing inflammation, regulating cell growth, lowering blood pressure and pumping up our immune system. Of course if you're going to be out there for longer than 15 mins please wear some sunscreen.

Spending time in nature is also associated with mood boosting, relieving stress, anxiety and depression like symptoms, improving health, boosting confidence and self esteem, and feelings of connectedness.

[Healthy Living 7 Health Benefits of Sunlight](#)

[Why Sunlight Is Actually Good For You](#)

[Ecopsychology: How Immersion in Nature Benefits Your Health](#)

[How nature benefits mental health](#)



2 Routines and getting dressed and ready for the day

Part of the difficulties with online learning from home is that it messes with our sense of routine. I want to encourage you to try to follow a set schedule as if you were actually attending school. Routines help us feel more in control of what's happening around us. Get up at the same time each day, get dressed, eat breakfast, clean your teeth, take your breaks as normal, facetime friends and maintain connection, switch off when you need to. But if you need a break from routine that's ok too.

[ArticlesThe secret benefit of routines. It won't surprise you.](#)

[The Importance of Maintaining Structure and Routine During Stressful Times](#)

3 Practice Gratitude

Gratitude (or looking for the good things in each day) is linked to so many health benefits that I can list them all! But it teaches us to be more optimistic, and we start looking for the good and rewiring our brains. It can boost mood, happiness, satisfaction, sleep, resilience, patience, relationships and prosocial behaviours. It also decreases pessimism, desire for material wealth, fatigue, inflammation, symptoms of anxiety and depression and sense of entitlement.

The experts suggest that we practice this daily, keeping a log or journal the big things/small things, to help us track our specific "blessings", helping us to say thank you more (and mean it) and look for the good things in our lives.

[Gratitude 14 Health Benefits of Practicing Gratitude According to Science](#)

[31 Benefits of Gratitude: The Ultimate Science-Backed Guide8K Total Shares](#)



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[How to Practice Gratitude](#)

4 Awareness - 54321 exercise, tense and release

Self awareness and being in the moment is something all mindfulness practices aim to achieve. Its how we can assess how we are right now, in this moment, and it also helps us to shift our anxious thoughts of the future into the present. This lowers our sense of stress or overwhelm. My 2 favourite exercises that I practice are 54321 (5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste, and finally extending our sense of where we are in our surround - almost like looking at myself from above.) and the tense and release (working my way around my body, checking for any bodily sensations, and then tensing muscles and releasing them).

[Relaxation strategy: Muscle tense and release | mp3.](#)

[Apr 17 • 2019 How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)

[How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)

[Guided Meditation: Tense and Release Exercises](#)



5 Self Compassion

And when we have those days where it all falls apart, try exercising some self compassion. Self compassion is about acknowledging our feelings, thoughts, pain, suffering, discomfort, difficulties, and mistakes. It's not about beating ourselves up or even dismissing these things, just acknowledging them in a non-judgemental way or having an awareness of them. These feelings are part of our human experience, and so we can take comfort that we are not alone in this. Try talking to yourself as if you were a child, remembering that we are all imperfect. (We are born to be real, not perfect.) and remembering that “even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise again”. (Victor Hugo).

[Definition and Three Elements of Self Compassion | Kristin Neff](#)
[Self-Compassion](#)

