

# Mental Fitness During Uncertainty

**HEAD...  
FIRST**

Most people are creatures of habit. When things go as planned, we feel in control. But when life throws a curveball, it can leave us feeling anxious and stressed. This is a totally normal reaction, and many of those around you will also be feeling the same. When we are faced with uncertainty, like the current COVID-19 situation, looking after our mental fitness and wellbeing becomes even more important.

Mental fitness and wellbeing are made up of a combination of things including our emotional, spiritual, physical and social health. When we focus on all four of these areas, we are more resilient and more able to cope with change. The Te Whare Tapa Whā model shows how these four pillars work together to support our wellbeing, made up of:

- Emotional:** Bringing attention to how we're thinking and feeling.
- Social:** Strengthen relationships with our friends, family and community as sources of support.
- Physical:** Looking after our physical body, making healthy choices with nutrition and exercise.
- Spiritual:** Connecting to our whānau, community and/or faith.



# Strategies to look after you

Below are some suggestions that can help to look after all areas of your wellbeing, and the wellbeing of your family, during times of uncertainty.

## Maintain your routine as much as possible

When you find yourself in a situation with lots of unknowns, maintaining a routine can provide some stability and reduce stress. Try to maintain habits around sleep, eating and training where possible.

## Control what you can

Focus on the things that are within your control, even if it's as simple as weekly meal planning or laying out your clothes the night before a stressful day.

## Whanaungatanga (connect with others)

Many people withdraw when they're feeling anxious and worried but connecting with people you trust is a great tool and can help you gain a different perspective on certain situations too. Keep up connections through social media, phone, videos etc.

## Talk it out

If you're finding it hard to cope, talking to others can remind you you're not going through things alone. Identify someone you trust to share with, that could be a teammate, partner, coach or a mate.

1737 is a free to text and call helpline number for all New Zealanders. You'll find a list of other supports at the end of this resource.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a handy way to create small mental breaks in your day. The research says just 15 minutes a day can have a massive impact on your mood and overall wellbeing.

Want to give it a go? Download the Headspace app on your phone, it's free.

## Gratitude

The research shows practicing gratitude can help us deal with adversities and bounce back from them with strength and motivation. Practicing gratitude can be as simple as writing down three things you're grateful for each morning and evening.

## Me Ako Tonu (Keep learning)

Take advantage of having more time than usual by seeking out learning. That could be as simple as reading a book, researching something online or chatting to someone about a new topic. Talk to your PDM about options

## Limit your media exposure to COVID-19

Although it's important to keep up to date with developments and any important information, try and limit your media exposure to a few key sources. The Ministry of Health website is a good place to start.

# If you're self-isolating

Healthline 0800 611 116 is the dedicated helpline for those people in self-isolation.

## Keep catch-ups and meetings in the calendar and do them 'together'.

Consider setting up a standing video chat lunch or coffee catch up where you and others can eat, drink and chat 'together'.

## Set-up a group text message chat.

Use Whatsapp or Facebook so you can connect with those teammates and friends outside of your immediate family.

## Try and continue activities you'd normally do, but from afar.

E.g. Watch a movie or TV show at the same time—there are tools for syncing up Netflix across multiple computers and for streaming the same videos on different screens.

## Consider the type of media you use.

Attention-heavy conversations (like those had in real time over the phone or video chat) can be spaced out but using frequent, lightweight contact in between (like sharing links, memes, or short messages) by text can still maintain connection.

## Exercise where you can.

Whilst you might not be able to get to the gym you can still exercise using bodyweight movements such as burpees, squats, lunges and push ups as well as running or cycling (being mindful of your proximity to others).

## Support: Where can I find it and how can I give it?

### EAP (Employee Assistance Programme)

EAP is a fully confidential and free service that all contracted players and their immediate family can access to get support for their mental health and wellbeing. It is staffed by trained counsellors and psychologists who will support you with anything from stress, anxiety and depression through to relationship difficulties and grief.

You can arrange an appointment online by visiting [www.instep.nz](http://www.instep.nz) and entering **nzru** as the username and **wellness** as the password or free phone **0800 284 678**.

### GP

If you're noticing that you or someone you know is experiencing stress or distress symptoms that are sticking around over days or weeks, then getting in touch with your GP or team doctor is a good place to start.

### 1737 helpline

1737 is the national free to call or text helpline number. The service is staffed with fully trained counsellors and is available 24/7 for advice or support on anything to do with mental health and wellbeing.

### HeadFirst.co.nz

HeadFirst is a resource for people in rugby to help them support their own wellbeing and that of others. There are tips and strategies as well as heaps of videos of players talking about their own experiences.

### PDM

Your PDM is a great person to talk to about how you are going and seek advice or support on either your wellbeing or other general areas you might like help with. They can help provide options on things like finance, study, community work etc.

### Want to check-in on someone but not quite sure how?

When we have a gut feeling someone might be struggling the hardest part can sometimes be starting a conversation. Use the ALEC model below to guide you on how to check-in.

**ASK** – Simply asking “are you doing OK” or “how are you coping with things lately?” is a good start.

**LISTEN** – Try using open ended questions like “that sounds really tough, can you tell me more about that?”.

**ENCOURAGE** – Ask questions about what they think might be helpful. It's also ok to not know what to say but let them know you'll help them find the right support.

**CHECK BACK IN** – Make sure you take responsibility to lock-in when you'll catch up next. Be specific about a day and time and avoid saying things like “text me if you need me”.

## Whanau, friends, community

During times of stress and worry, connecting with existing support network around you is one of the best ways to support both yourself and those you care about. Be proactive in reaching out, creating space to spend time with your loved ones and talking about what you're thinking and feeling. Keeping connections with your church or faith is also helpful.

## Looking after children during COVID-19

Children and young people benefit most from factual, age appropriate information as it can often prevent their worries and concerns from becoming overwhelming. Letting a child/young person's questions guide the information you give can be a handy tool.

### Reassure

Children can often be pondering big questions when there is uncertainty present, they may ask "will I get sick? Will granny/grandad die?". Reassuring them that everyone is working hard to make sure people throughout the country stay healthy is important.

### Give honest and accurate information

Letting a child or young person's questions guide what you share is a good place to start but regardless of their age, giving clear, accurate information is important. Explain that not everyone will get the virus and the vast majority who do will recover fully.

### Make yourself available

Children may need extra attention from you at the moment and may want to talk about their fear and worries. Let them know you love them and show them plenty of affection. Keep an eye out for clues they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you cook dinner etc. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back and ask more.

### Monitor TV and social media viewing

Try and avoid constantly monitoring or talking about updates of COVID-19 as this can heighten anxiety. Instead, give brief updates where necessary e.g. if there is a change to their school schedule.

### Maintain a normal routine

Try and keep a regular, consistent routine (mealtimes, bedtimes etc.) to help signal that their routines are under control and will continue as normal. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities where possible.

### Tips if your child is anxious

Try offering children simple choices to help give them a feeling of being in control. Would they like to use the red towel or the white towel to dry their hands? Spend some time together - would they like to do a puzzle or listen while you read a story.

### Other helpful links:

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/ways-to-wellbeing/)

[www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/](http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/)

[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus)