

Self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic

The current situation and the restrictions of everyday life that have been put into effect represent a turning point. The changes in everyday and social life can be a psychological burden for people, especially for those who have to deal with anxiety, depressive symptoms and other illnesses. Even more so than during the lecture-free periods, there is now an even greater lack of routines that provide structure and orientation, which have made the day predictable and plannable through lectures, deadlines, appointments and appointments, among other things. This can also create feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, many self-evident things are suddenly questioned and it is currently not foreseeable when normality will return.

Often this leads to a feeling of stress, inner turmoil and intense feelings, perhaps poor sleep and poorer concentration. Many of the cutbacks affect not only social contacts but also holidays and events that people have been looking forward to very much. Frustration and sadness over the loss of these wonderful experiences arise. In concrete terms, this can also mean that in the next few days and weeks there is little positive or special to look forward to.

In dealing with this challenging situation, a few recommendations may be helpful to get back to a feeling of security and confidence.

Acceptance: A situation as exceptional as this one requires an adjustment effort, the first step of which is to accept the status quo and the new rules and regulations. For only if one succeeds in accepting this temporary state and initially enduring negative feelings can one come to rest and gather strength, and then, when one has calmed down and recovered sufficiently, work actively on changing their situation. This also means to be benevolent towards oneself and to acknowledge that this is a challenging time, that one may have difficulties with the change or that one is insecure. Haggling with the situation or trying hard not to be influenced by what is happening around you is unlikely to lead to more positive feelings.

Structure: Despite the unusual situation, try to keep as much of your everyday life as possible. If, however, the loss of regular activities suddenly leaves many empty spaces in your daily routine, this also offers the opportunity to establish new processes. If a routine is not imposed from the outside, it is up to us to set cornerstones and give ourselves security about them. It can be helpful to first consider what is a good time to get up (even without direct necessity). This certainly also helps if you ask yourself what a good ritual for starting the day might be. For many people, the three meals of the day offer natural anchors that create predictable periods of time in the morning and afternoon.

Activity: In principle, the general recommendations regarding sufficient sleep, a balanced diet and exercise apply especially now. Physical well-being is an important basis to support the psyche in coping with the challenges. The more active and varied you make your days, the more you can gain a sense of control over your life. Positive activities are also an important factor in terms of mood. For example, you can rediscover former hobbies or devote some of your time to books or series/movies and other projects for which time has been lacking before. For a positive effect, however, it is important to devote oneself consciously (and for a limited period of time) to the individual activities; with "too much", the pleasant feelings are easily lost. A timetable can be helpful for that.

Information management: The constant flood of information and news about infection rates, public reactions and regulations of the authorities or the economic effects of the pandemic can on the one hand satisfy the need for orientation. If you need information, use trusted sources such as the Ministry of Health, the Robert Koch Institute or local health authorities.

On the other hand, the constant confrontation with such information can also be a burden and lead to negative feelings or pronounced brooding. In this case, it is advisable not to constantly expose yourself to this information, e.g. only visit news portals at certain times and limit your time on your smartphone or computer or temporarily deactivate notifications.

Dealing with brooding and fears: The amount of information, the uncertainty and the restrictions in public life can lead to fears, stress and negative thoughts. These thoughts and emotions are initially understandable and natural in the current situation. Many people will feel very similar. However, these thoughts and feelings should not determine your day. Consciously interrupt these negative thoughts and direct your attention to positive thoughts. Write index cards with positive thoughts and regularly pull a card from the pile throughout the day. The targeted use of mindfulness and relaxation exercises can also be helpful; you will find instructions and guides on numerous websites.

Social interaction: Social contacts are a supporting resource and an important balance to everyday life. Interpersonal contact can reduce stress, increase one's own feeling of security and offers the opportunity to talk about one's own feelings and well-being. Current measures to restrict social contacts therefore run counter to human needs and can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation; in this case, however, it is worthwhile to think specifically about other ways of communication and to use them consciously. For example, in addition to letters or postcards, you could consider making appointments with friends and family for phone calls or chats, FaceTime or Skype. Contact with others can also be successful despite a distance that is currently necessary; one can also feel a sense of community, solidarity, and belonging through the exchange of coping options.