

COVID-19 positive – supporting your mental wellbeing



Having a positive diagnosis for COVID-19 might make you feel anxious, concerned or uncertain about your illness, the newness of the treatment and the quarantine involved.

On this page, you can find the following information:

- [What should I expect with a COVID-19 diagnosis?](#)
- [How might having COVID-19 affect my mental wellbeing?](#)
- [How can I take care of my mental wellbeing with COVID-19?](#)
- [Tips to help take care of your mental health](#)
- [Your environment and your mental health](#)
- [Your physical health affects your mental wellbeing](#)

Feeling low or down about restrictions on our normal lives is also a normal response. That means it's more important than ever to know the key steps to managing your mental health.

What should I expect with a COVID-19 diagnosis?

Most people with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis will have symptoms for up to 2 weeks. Symptoms tend to appear around 2–5 days after you are infected but can take up to 14 days to show. Read more about [what to expect with a COVID-19 infection](#).

How might having COVID-19 affect my mental wellbeing?

It's understandable to feel sad, distressed, worried, confused, anxious or angry if you have the COVID-19 virus and are unwell. Everyone reacts differently and some may find this time more challenging than others.

You may notice more anxiety or low mood or other changes in how you feel or behave. In addition, being unwell means that you may not be able to tend to your regular responsibilities, which can be worrying. You may be concerned with changes to your daily situation such as a lack of income or not having support to take care of your children, parents or pets.

How can I take care of my mental wellbeing with COVID-19?

When you have COVID-19, the physical symptoms of the illness may be obvious and are important to monitor, but taking care of your mental health and wellbeing is also important.

The Māori holistic model of health, te whare tapa whā, reminds you to take care of all the different aspects of your life to support your wellbeing.



Image: *NukuOra, NZ*

By looking after and strengthening all aspects of te whare tapa whā, you support your own health and wellbeing, as well as the health and wellbeing of your whānau. Read more about [te whare tapa whā and wellbeing](#).

Tips to help take care of your mental health

Stay connected

Although you will be quarantined while you have COVID, you can still reach out to your usual supports – whānau, friends and workmates – over the phone or online. Staying in touch more often with the people you care about, making sure they're doing okay, will help you too.

Breathe and be present

Knowing how to use your breathe to calm your nervous system is a key tool in your wellbeing kit. Taking a long, slow breathe in, holding it for a few seconds and then slowly, slowly breathing out really makes a difference. Try out the breathing exercises at [Hikitia Te Hā All Right?](#)

Being mindful helps you become more present to yourself and reduces the build-up of tension, stress and anxiety. The more you practise being mindful, the more you benefit from it.

Check out the resources, including a daily practice, as well as videos and apps to get you started, in our [mindfulness section](#).

Reach out

While you are in quarantine, you will be able reach out to your healthcare team, who will check on you regularly. If you are feeling unwell and your mental health is getting worse, let them know. They will be able to assist you.

You can also contact other services you may need such as the following:

- **Call 1737** – Freephone or text 1737 to talk to a trained counsellor for support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing. This service is free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **Lifeline** – Freephone 0800 543 354 or text HELP (4357) to talk to a counsellor or trained volunteers.
- **Samaritans** – Freephone 0800 726 666 for someone who will listen.
- **Depression Helpline** – Freephone 0800 111 757 or free text 4202 to talk to a trained counsellor.

- **Asian family services** – Freephone 0800 862 342 to access help in 10 languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and English. The helpline provides nationwide free and confidential services from Monday to Friday between 9am–8pm.
- **Alcohol Drug Helpline** – Freephone 0800 787 797 or free text 8681 or online chat at alcoholdrughelp.org.nz for support with alcohol or other drug problems.
- **OUTLine NZ** – Freephone 0800 688 5463 for confidential, free LGBTIQ+ support from a trained volunteer. This service is available from 6–9pm every evening.
- **Kaupapa Māori mental health services** – Find a list of services on Healthpoint.
- **South Seas Healthcare Trust** – Pacific primary care and social service provider. Languages spoken: Samoan, Tongan and English. Phone 09 278 2694 or visit their website southseas.org.nz.
- **West Fono Health Trust** – Pacific primary care and social service provider. Languages spoken: Samoan, Tongan and English. Phone 09 837 1780 or visit their website westfono.co.nz.
- **Vaka Tautua** – A national by Pacific, for Pacific health, disability and social services provider in Aotearoa with a strong presence in the Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury region. Freephone 0800 825 282 or visit their website vakatautua.co.nz.
- **Mapu Maia** – National Pacific problem gambling support service. Freephone 0800 21 21 22 or visit their website Mapu Maia.
- **Le Va** – National Pacific mental health and suicide prevention provider. Phone: 09-261 3490 or visit their website leva.co.nz.

We also have a list of [mental health and wellbeing apps](#).

Minimise news feeds

Try to reduce how much you watch, read or listen to news that makes you feel anxious or distressed. Seek the latest information at specific times of the day, once or twice a day if needed. Be aware of how much time you spend in front of a screen every day. Make sure that you take regular breaks from on-screen activities.

Avoid alcohol and drug use

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink or don't drink alcohol at all. Don't start drinking alcohol if you have not drunk alcohol before. Avoid using alcohol and drugs as a way of dealing with fear, anxiety, boredom and [loneliness](#) or [social isolation](#).

There is no evidence of any protective effect of drinking alcohol for viral or other infections. In fact, the opposite is true as the harmful use of alcohol is associated with increased risk of infections and worse treatment outcomes.

Find the lighter moments

No one's denying this is a tough time, but even in times like this, there are still moments that can uplift us. Make a point of finding something beautiful in nature each day in your garden, or out your window. And listen to music – choose something that will uplift you if you're feeling a bit low or under-stimulated, or pick something calming if you're starting to feel anxious.

Seek spiritual comfort

Turn to your cultural or spiritual practices that connect you to a sense of purpose and meaning. It may be accepting care from the others around you, or pets or the environment you're in. It may be a formal practice, such as meditation. You may need to find online services to replace your usual community gatherings. And remember, you are showing manaakitanga by taking care of people by staying away from them!

Accept the situation

You should understand that you have a viral infection and your body is fighting it. Everyone will feel different in their recovery – some people may recover in days, some in weeks, while for a few it could be months.

Some things are out of your hands – and in this case, you can't do much about the existence of COVID-19. But there are things you can do: stay at home, stay away from others and save lives, wash your hands often and cough or sneeze into your sleeve so you don't spread the virus (or other bugs).

Knowing what you can control and what you can't control helps to cope through times like this. Focus on what you can do in a challenging situation helps to make you stronger.

Your environment and your mental health

Your physical space and how it feels can really help:

- A shower or bath can make you feel better.
- Change your bed linen – fresh sheets feel great.
- Let fresh air and sunlight into rooms.
- [Vapour rubs](#) can help and some people find the smell comforting.
- A hot drink of water, tea or coffee and your favourite pair of slippers can be comforting.

It's all about doing things that make you feel good and support your body to recover.

Your physical health affects your mental wellbeing

Looking after your body as you recover is a way to look after your mental health. Make it a priority to get enough sleep, try some gentle exercise and have regular nutritious meals. This is because sleep, exercise and diet are all linked to how you feel emotionally.

Rest and drink plenty of fluid

By resting, your body will be able to devote more energy to fighting the virus. Resting gives your body the opportunity to focus on strengthening your immune system. Keeping hydrated by drinking plenty of water is important – being dehydrated can add to feelings of tiredness, fatigue, low energy and low mood.

Get enough sleep

You may not have the routine that going to work or looking after children provides, however, a good routine helps with good sleep. Take naps whenever you need to, as your body recovers. Aim for regular bedtimes and waking times to set your body clock into a rhythm, making it easier to get to sleep each night.

Resist the temptation to stay up late streaming movies and go to bed at about the same time each night. Read more [sleep tips](#).

Avoid strenuous exercise

If you have a fever, body aches, tiredness, fatigue or other symptoms, such as a stomach ache or cough, it's best to rest for a few days until your symptoms settle.

Even if you have a mild COVID-19 infection, avoid running, strenuous exercise and high-impact activities until you've been cleared by your healthcare team. As you recover, you can gently ease into exercise such as arm raises, sitting and standing or marching.

Eat a healthy diet

The link between food and mood is clear – what you eat affects not only your physical health but also your mental health.

Eating some foods can improve your mood and mental wellbeing, while other foods can have a negative impact on how you feel.

The key is to choose a diet high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains and fish, with smaller portions of lean meat and dairy – and to limit those sugary, salty and processed foods. Read more about [food and mood](#).

Take medicines to ease your symptoms

Although there is no specific cure for COVID-19, there are treatments that can ease symptoms such as cough, fever, body aches and runny poo (diarrhoea). Your healthcare team may be able to suggest medicines to ease your symptoms. Helping ease your symptoms may enable you to feel better and have a better night's sleep.

Keep taking your regular medicines

If you are taking any regular medicine/s for a health condition, keep taking them. Keeping your long-term conditions under control is important to helping you to recover from COVID-19.

Try to stick to your normal routine

Try to stick to your normal routine as much as possible. When you are sick, this routine will change but, as you recover, it will make going back to normal easier.

Learn more

[Mental distress](#)
[Mental health topics](#)

The following links provide further information about taking care of your mental health. Be aware that websites from other countries may have information that differs from New Zealand recommendations.

[Looking after mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19](#) Mental Health Foundation, NZ

[Managing triggered thoughts and emotions](#) Mental Health Foundation, NZ

[Mind, mood and wellness](#) Fresh Minds, NZ

[Getting through together](#) All Right and Mental Health Foundation, NZ

[Manaaki 20](#) Manaaki20 is about keeping whānau connected and informed, and inspiring whānau by sharing stories of what we're doing to keep each other healthy, well and connected.

[Staying on track](#) A free online course that introduces easy-to-use, practical strategies to support Kiwis through the COVID-19 outbreak. Just a Thought, NZ

[Mindfulness in isolation course](#) Wanderble, NZ

[Whakatau mai](#) Free, virtual community events aimed at supporting wellbeing in real time, with real people. These diverse sessions invite you to connect with others, learn and practice new skills, and start to look at things differently – one conversation at a time.

[Living with COVID-19](#) Mental Health Foundation, NZ

References

1. [How does anxiety affect sleep?](#) National Sleep Foundation, US
2. Madhav KC, Sherchand SP, Sherchan S. [Association between screen time and depression among US adults](#) Prev Med Rep. 2017;8:67–71.
3. Twenge JM, Campbell WK. [Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents – evidence from a population-based study](#) . Prev Med Rep. 2018;12:271–283.

