

11 Mental Fitness Tips during Covid 19 Lockdown.

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There is so much helpful, creative, ingenious, fun filled, generous and wonderful advice, tips, support and encouragement being shared globally. It inspires connectivity, acknowledging we are all in this together and is highlighting the courage, generosity, power and effectiveness of empowerment and support thus helping us all through these strange, challenging and for many, very frightening times.

If you happen to find yourself with 10 minutes to spare, feel free to read below a few things which may help maintain your mental fitness that I have been able to work with, with my clients, colleagues and myself :)

ACCEPTANCE  People who get the meaning of the serenity prayer, in essence (with no religious connotations just its pure message), often tend to cope better in stressful situations, by accepting the things they cannot change (which is quite a lot at the moment!) changing the things they can (so hopefully some of the tips below will help) and have the wisdom to know the difference. In other words if Covid 19 has not had a direct, devastating, life changing impact on you, like it has thousands of people, then put your energy into what you can do, not feed the anger, pain, resentment, frustration of what you, at the moment cannot do).

GRATITUDE  Brain training is as important as physical training for fitness. We know the familiar expressions "**Whatever you focus on grows**" "**if you don't use it you lose it**". Now is so important to focus on seemingly small every day moments of gratitude. Things that we until Covid 19 we have assumed, not noticed, taken for granted. This also has a powerful effect on your brain, building new healthier neural pathways, increasing mood supporting hormones like serotonin. It's easy to practice at brief moments throughout the day, here are some examples.



Grateful my friend sent a message that made me smile

Grateful I have a garden to sit in

Grateful I got toilet roll

Grateful I had a nice cup of coffee

Grateful I can hear birdsong

Grateful I could help a neighbour

Grateful I had some sleep

There are lots of reasons to be grateful, start finding your small every day reasons.

RESPECT  Physical / social distancing is obviously mandatory, with thousands of great messages telling people to respect the Covid 19 safety procedures but it is pretty much reaching the audience that already understands and are respectfully and selflessly doing it. Be proud of yourself and those around you who are adhering to this and showing Respect to those amazing people who have to keep going out there, whatever their vital job (paid or volunteering). Respect that if you are all cooped up in the same house, those individuals, if possible will need space and private time, it's not a rejection.

CONNECTING  Taking time to contact friends, family, colleagues, neighbours. Valuing the connections we have, and that we are all guilty of assuming and at times taken for granted. Realising that may be when all this has passed, next time we go out to a restaurant we will all value and share our physical time together, engaging, embracing, connecting and not spend that time on our phones and devices. We now realise how precious being together actually is. And when we get back to being together, embracing the fact we were the lucky ones that survived.



SHARING HUMOUR  I cannot remember the last time I consistently received so many wonderful, funny, hilarious texts, videos, clips, jokes and stories. Sharing humour has a huge beneficial effect on our physicality. Laughing enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulating your heart, lungs and muscles, and your brain increases the endorphin production, that not only makes us feel better emotionally, but actually helps boost the immune system by helping release antibodies. Laughter is contagious and this is the sort of contagion we need right now.

LEARNING  Stimulation of our brain is vital to maintain mental fitness. We are hardwired to keep learning, downloading and processing new data daily and it is vital for our healthy functioning. Getting regular new stimulus helps expand our world, our creative and intellectual abilities, makes more connections, builds confidence, stops us going static and stale (which can accelerate low mood and a sense of emptiness and depression). So what can you learn today, even if it's just for 20 minutes? A new recipe, a few words in another language, new creative or technical skill, new cultural or historical fact, how to do a puzzle etc etc? Use your brain; it's got a lot to offer!

KINDNESS  To see the kindness to keyworkers, neighbours, strangers as well as our friends and loved ones is a vital part of maintaining mental fitness. When we perform an act of kindness it has a chemical effect on our brain – we produce a hormone called oxytocin, a wonderful hormone that not only stimulates us to connect with others (the bonding or love hormone some call it) but it can help reduce blood pressure (which is probably higher than normal!) by releasing nitric acid in the blood vessels which effectively expands the blood vessels. So why would you not try that for your physical and mental health? It is literally a no brainer! We also know Kindness boosts your self-worth, desire to want to connect more, gives you purpose (which a lot of people have lost right now) and it can build your compassion muscle, creating a want to keep doing this.

APPRECIATING DIFFERENCES  If you are fortunate enough to be isolating with loved ones (as so many people are either living alone, or living in abusive situations where right now they cannot escape from) first, go back to gratitude that you, despite the fact we will all niggle and p@#S each other off at some point, being around each other for so long, at least you are safe and have company. So now is the time to find out and share your differences – to learn (so that goes back to learning something new every day too) about something the other person likes/enjoys that you would not normally engage in. Take this time to experience their reasons, and you still

may not share the same pleasure as them, but you have shown each other more respect kindness, understanding and effort. Expand your emotional and intellectual horizons, you do not have to keep your world small. For example if your partner loves modern art go on a live stream together of an Art Gallery , and then the next day ,if you love mountaineering and they can't stand it ,go together on a virtual tour or watch a documentary about it and share why and what it does for you . Connects, build respect, stimulates learning – *can you see that all these mental fitness ideas support each other – everything is truly connected?*

CREATIVE



We do know that getting creative is good for our mental fitness too. When we are being creative it helps shut down our panic/fear response. Put it like this , if we were really under immediate danger, such as a tiger is coming through the front door, and its chosen you for its tea, we would want our fight or flight response to activate ,we would need our little almond sized Amygdala(,the brains smoke alarm to danger) ,to activate . So we would not naturally at that point decide we are going start painting our way out of the danger! That would be a bit weird!



So when we are being creative it has a calming effect on our sometimes neglected friend, our brain. It also stimulates concentration skills, connecting with others and a gives sense of worth and achievement. Being creative can be anything – cooking ,baking ,gardening ,painting ,drawing ,playing writing ,engaging in music , making videos, physical activities such as dancing ,yoga, martial arts ,fitness , writing ,singing , you can add to this non exhaustive list (adding to your creative skills).

STRUCTURE



As much as I am sure there were lots of good intentions in early lockdown, as New Year's resolutions prove, it's the sustaining of them that's the tricky bit! Don't be too rigid in structuring your days; allow fluidity and a sense of some freedom. Do have a reasonable structure though, as without it we get lost ,demotivated and guilty very quickly – this gives us more of an understanding of how depression can so rapidly take over .Set the alarm daily, and have at least 2 or 3 things planned to achieve each day . Put it in your Diary and give a rough time as to when you will do it ,whether that's doing some work ,cleaning ,exercise ,reading , watching or learning something , calling someone .Have small plans – we still need focus and structure without it being a regime .

NO PRESSURE / NO GUILT



There are still other worries ,issues , ailments ,illnesses ,pain ,fear ,heartbreak , grief etc that is happening other than Covid 19 . Your personal issues and situations cannot be diminished because right now there is a global crisis. Allow yourself to still feel those things, and not beat yourself up by comparing your problems versus others – its not helpful to do that at any time – you are unique and what you feel and experience is yours - you are no less than anyone else ,it's just different ,or in addition to . However, if you practice at least some of the above while we are in the Covid19 era, it might just help make it a bit easier.

There are people experiencing and yet to encounter severe loss and trauma, this has exacerbated pre-existing mental health issues and for so many the struggle is immense . The unconditional support is out there and people's

generosity of spirit has given hope. If these times are so dark that the above would not even cut it for you ,please remember you are not on your own even though I know it will feel like you are .Asking for help can be the hardest thing to do ,but it is do-able – you cannot have courage without experiencing fear – so asking for help is courage itself, from the heart , you are no less than anyone else , and from Samaritans , to local community and charities ,support groups – all easily found on the internet ,from local councils , phone lines and TV and radio , the information for you ,for whatever your need is ,will be out there .

Finally, thanks for taking the time to read this, and please remember

We need to work together. Respect and generosity will combat fear and vulnerability.

Being selfless and sensible will take pressure off keyworkers and vital services.

Saves lives - saves communities - saves the economy - saves us.

