



Three actions to enhance and protect your mental well-being during and after COVID-19

COVID-19 has changed how we live, work and connect with family and friends. This can make us feel distressed and overwhelmed. Understanding our stress response and learning simple techniques to calm distressing emotions and change negative thoughts, can help us feel more in control and less stressed. **Learning and practising these techniques before you experience distress can help you stay well during and after COVID-19.**

1. Understand the stress response

When we are faced with a stressful situation our heart beats faster, our breathing is quicker, our muscles tense up and we find it difficult to concentrate. This stress, or 'fight or flight', response is how we have evolved to react quickly to dangerous situations to keep safe.

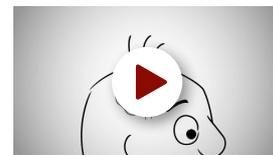
Sometimes this response can stay activated even though it

is no longer helpful. When this happens, it can be difficult to wind down and think clearly. We may also experience distressing emotions and negative thoughts.

Understanding this can be helpful in learning how to manage distress.

Find out more about the stress response in

this 90-second video by Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (the first video at this link): www.recoveryonline.org.au/managing-emotions



2. Calm distressing emotions

Often, the best ways to manage distressing emotions are the simplest.

Most people take fast, shallow breaths when they are feeling worried or anxious. A good way to help calm distressing emotions is to practise controlled breathing where you take slow, deep breaths. This can help calm your mind and body, so you feel in control and are able to think more clearly.

Watch this 2-minute video and try the controlled breathing tool by High Res,

Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA): <https://highres.dva.gov.au/highres/#!/tools/controlled-breathing>



START TOOL

Another way to help manage distressing emotions is to practise grounding or mindfulness. This allows you to connect to what is happening right now, and be more aware of what you can see, hear and

feel. This can help you develop a calmer mind and build resilience to stress.

Watch this 90-second video including a guided grounding tool by High Res, DVA: <https://highres.dva.gov.au/highres/#!/tools/guided-grounding>



START TOOL



3. Replace negative thoughts

Negative thoughts can make anxiety worse. These thoughts can stop us from thinking well and enjoying life. Try not to dwell on negative thoughts and instead focus on what you are doing at present.

Watch this 2-minute video and try the 'stop and swap thoughts' tool by High Res, DVA: <https://highres.dva.gov.au/highres/#!/tools/thought-stopping>



Stay informed but access only trustworthy and accurate COVID-19 information. Good sources include:

- the Australian Government DVA Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) information website at: www.dva.gov.au/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-information

- the Australian Government Department of Health website at: www.health.gov.au

Aim to recognise and acknowledge what went well during each day. It could be something as simple as walking around the block and enjoying being outside. Taking time to acknowledge these things helps to reduce stress and improve physical health.

4. Maintain healthy routines

Stay connected with family and friends, via email, phone or video to minimise loneliness and help think positively.

Engage in physical activity

each day to gain the positive effects it has on your mental well-being. Don't forget to ensure that you maintain physical distancing as per your state government's policy.

Get a good night's sleep, eat a well-balanced diet, and avoid using alcohol to reduce stress to help maintain your mental well-being.

Stay in contact with your healthcare team and seek more assistance if needed

Continuing to see all your usual healthcare professionals, including those who support your mental health, is the best way to help you stay well during and after this time. Your appointments can be face-to-face or via telehealth (phone or video). **If you are struggling, speak with your GP or a mental health professional such as a psychologist or mental health nurse.**

If you need to talk to someone, call Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling for free and confidential counselling on 1800 011 046, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or visit: www.openarms.gov.au

If you need emergency care, please contact emergency services on 000.

Useful resources

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling website: www.openarms.gov.au

- **Living Well** at: www.openarms.gov.au/living-well
- **COVID-19: Calming and Coping** at: www.openarms.gov.au/about/news/2020/covid19-calming-and-coping, and **COVID-19 Adjusting and Adapting** at: www.openarms.gov.au/about/news/2020/covid19-adjusting-and-adapting

High Res, DVA website with techniques to help build resilience and deal with distress at: <https://highres.dva.gov.au/highres/#!/home>