

## **From lockdown to relaxation of Covid rules: tips on looking after your wellbeing**

For many of us, the easing of lockdown restrictions outside of work (note: no changes to NUK Covid-compliance rules) brings longed-for opportunities – to see friends, play sports, resume contact with family in ‘real space’ or get back to work that we value.

But for many of us, even the happy, much anticipated changes and re-adjustment can be difficult for our wellbeing.

And, for many others coming out of lockdown when debate is still live about the science supporting it can be a real worry. This may especially apply to those more vulnerable to the virus and those of us with mental health concerns.

**What can we do?** – we should be prepared for the fact that the end of lockdown might be as hard for us as the start was. Just as it took us time to find ways of coping during lockdown, we should also expect that it will take time to find our way back, and to reconnect with life. Things may not be the same as they were before. Staying connected, eating well, and taking exercise apply just as much now as they did at the start of lockdown – arguably even more so as we remain in a period of high stress but with more demands on us. Because our situations are unique to us, it is really important to try not to judge ourselves harshly based on what other people are doing. Everybody is facing uncertainty and challenge – and we have no choice but to move through it as best we can with our own coping mechanisms.

**Fear and anxiety** – Fear and anxiety are possibly the most common emotional responses any of us will feel as we release from lockdown. Finding a way to pull ourselves through lockdown took a lot of our emotional energy and we may have found a place that lets us cope, and that we don’t want to leave behind just yet.

It’s important to acknowledge that these feelings are reasonable, and to expect them. It’s only by building up tolerance gently that we can move through these fears.

If possible, take things at your own pace – but try and challenge yourself to try something different each day or every couple of days. It’s very easy to allow the seclusion that was necessary in lockdown to become deliberate isolation as lockdown ends. Celebrate small wins (and big wins) and try and keep a note of what you are achieving.

## **Tips on coping with fear and anxiety**

**Control what can be controlled** – there are a lot of things you can’t control that cause you fear and anxiety – but there are some things you can manage or plan for. Having an action plan for managing things you might find difficult can help.

**Pace yourself** – recognising that you need to go at the right pace for you is important. Don’t let others bully or pressure you into doing things you don’t want to – but try not to let that be an excuse not to push yourself, especially when it comes to reconnecting with friends safely, outside your home, when the time is right for you. It can be hard to let others move forward without you – maybe your child wants to see friends, but you can’t. It’s important to discuss concerns with those close to you, but also to allow other people space to move at their own pace.

**Build up tolerance** – try doing something that challenges you every day, or every few days. Don’t beat yourself up if it doesn’t go well but keep at it. Keep a note of things you’ve achieved, enjoyed or surprised yourself doing.

**Vary your routines** – try and vary your routines so that you see different people and encounter different situations. If one supermarket makes you nervous, try another. If a walk at one time of the day is very busy, try mixing walks at busy times with walks at quieter times.

## Coping with uncertainty

**Focus on the present** – you can only do your best with what you have today. With regulations changing frequently, and lots of conflicting media discussions, try and keep a focus on the moment.

**Bring things that are certain back into focus** – whilst a lot of things are uncertain at the moment, there are also things to be hopeful about. Try to record and appreciate good things as they happen.

**Talk to people you trust** – it's important to talk about how you feel. Don't dismiss your concerns or judge yourself too harshly. You may also be able to find your tribe online, but try and get outside perspectives too.

## Picking up social lives

It is now possible to start picking up our social lives again – albeit with changes for the foreseeable future. Some of us are desperate to do so – but others will be nervous about doing so and going back into clubs and public, crowded spaces – or unable to do so because of their situations.

- If you are part of a social group doing an activity together, try and plan ways for people who aren't ready for face to face meetings to still take part.
- We may have become comfortable in our own space and with our own company in lockdown – it's been intense in all sorts of ways and we might really have to push ourselves to reconnect with people and overcome initial awkwardness. Whether it's feeling uncomfortable not wearing a mask anymore, or feeling odd to suddenly see people in large groups again, take things at your own pace. Even if government advice is to no longer socially distance, or to wear a mask, you can decide on what suits you best. **(Please note, NUK Covid-compliance rules continue to apply/have not changed.)**
- That also goes for our children's friendships – many children have been desperate to see friends, but all families are making sense of the changes. Going back to school will bring new pressures and it's important to make an extra effort to support our children, getting back into the school routine, and picking up friendships.
- If we are in a vulnerable group, it's likely that as others around us start to emerge from lockdown and start to do things that we miss, we may feel more isolated and less able to resist pressure to reduce lockdown measures. There's a real risk that schools, businesses and friends and family will be less able to relate and support as the lockdown releases for others.
- Remember that rules and guidelines vary depending on who you are and where you live.

## Looking after children and family

During lockdown, those of us with caring responsibilities have supported our families. For parents and carers, returning to work is likely to provide a distance that might be much welcomed and needed – but also prove challenging emotionally when family closeness has been such a support to so many during lockdown.

With pupils going back to school after the summer holidays, this will mean another change in routine and, in the short-term, more disruption.

A similar situation arises for unpaid carers: perhaps the physical or mental health of the person they care for has deteriorated during lockdown and their own needs have changed. This will mean new assessments and changes in service provision.

## Grief

Grief is something many of us will have experienced during the lockdown. Many people will have faced the loss of someone close during this past year, and with attendance at funerals restricted, and non-socially distanced company only recently available, this has been doubly hard.

It is now possible to see people again, and to provide support to those close to us who have been bereaved.

**Source: Mental Health Foundation**  
**Further information is available from the HR Department**  
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