

This year's national theme for Men's Health Week is the impact of COVID-19.

The pandemic has affected us all, and in many different ways; from those working on the front line, to those dealing with loss or ill health, from those whose earning capacity has been affected, to those adapting to new ways of working, and from those managing home lives, to those facing social isolation...the effects have been wide ranging. This week provides an opportunity to consider our health and wellbeing and to support each other during this challenging time.

## Impacts on Physical Health

COVID-19 is having a major impact on men's health. According to the **Men's Health Forum Ireland**, while there is broadly similar incidence in men and women, men are faster at developing serious illness, are slower to recover and have a higher death rate. We know that men are traditionally less likely to seek medical help than women, which can compound the potential for a serious illness to be left unchecked. It's important that we all take the proper precautions, follow the most recent government and health service advice and importantly – seek help when we need it.

## Impacts on Mental Health

According to the **World Health Authority**, the main mental health impact of the pandemic has been an increase in stress and anxiety, and as new measures and impacts are introduced, their effects on many normal activities, routines and livelihoods may see an increase in loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm. Andrew Kinder, author of **Positive Male Mind** suggests that while the typical 'macho' male self-image sense of invulnerability persists, the virus has no respect for these attitudes, and importantly, "...men used to feeling in control of their lives, their career, their independence, have lost potentially much of this." Better then to focus on the things we can control.

So what practical steps can we take to look after our physical and mental wellbeing during this time?

**Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give.** Taking these 5 simple steps can help us to maintain and improve our wellbeing. While current restrictions may limit our usual routines, it gives us opportunity to think creatively about how we can build these 5 steps into our daily lives:

## CONNECT

Now more than ever, it's important to stay connected. Relationships can help us to build a sense of belonging and self-worth, to provide emotional support and share in positive experiences:

- Where possible, take time each day to be with your family – try arranging a fixed time to eat dinner together, and try switching off the TV for more quality time.
- With the so-called 'zoom-boom', there's every opportunity to make the most of technology – setting up a regular video chat or a virtual table quiz is a great, fun way to stay connected.
- As lockdown restrictions are eased, why not arrange to meet up with friends or family in an outdoor space?
- Whether it's a friend, a family member or a colleague, even a simple phone call or a text asking someone how they are, or sharing how you feel can make all the difference.





## BE ACTIVE

Being active can improve our mental as well as physical health. It can give us energy, make us feel happier, boost our mood and increase our self-esteem. With many of us working from home, we may feel that we've become more sedentary or inactive – it's therefore important that we look for ways to keep moving!

- Discover a physical activity you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness, and set yourself a goal to achieve.
- Go for a walk, run or cycle – try it with friends or family (while socially distancing) to keep it fun and to keep your motivation levels up.
- Get outside – exercise doesn't need to feel taxing – it could be playing in the garden with your children or doing a spot of gardening – anything that increases the heart rate.
- Use technology – if exercising outdoors isn't your thing, there are lots of ways to stay active inside. YouTube is great for workout videos you can follow along to – just ask Joe Wicks!

## TAKE NOTICE

With so much constant change and uncertainty, it can be easy to feel overwhelmed – operating on autopilot, we can find ourselves caught up in a never-ending current of thoughts, feelings, worries, pressures and responsibilities. Becoming more mindful – coming back to and focusing on the present moment can help us to meet these challenges with clarity and confidence.

- Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness practice helps us to take notice of our senses. By developing self-awareness, we can gradually learn to more easily pay attention to what's already there, helping us to build resilience and self-capacity. For more on mindfulness practice, visit: [www.inspirewellbeing.org/mindfulnessinstitute](http://www.inspirewellbeing.org/mindfulnessinstitute)
- Notice the everyday – even as we go about our daily lives, we can notice sensations – what we eat, what we interact with. Take a mindful walk and notice something you've never noticed before.
- Be aware of the world around you and what you're feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you. Try spending some time in silence each day to reflect on your thoughts.
- Take time away from social media. The torrent of information on social media can sometimes be overwhelming. Allow yourself time to disconnect and find space for your own thoughts.



## KEEP LEARNING

With many of us finding we have additional free time, now is a great opportunity to experience and try new things. Learning new things can help to boost our self-confidence, raise self-esteem, build a sense of purpose and help us to connect:

- Learn to cook something you haven't tried before. Many of us are becoming much more acquainted with our kitchens – why not try a new dish to test out on others?
- Work on a project, try a new hobby, or rediscover something that will challenge you. There are lots of freely available online resources, Youtube tutorials and apps.
- Consider signing up for an online course. It could be something you've been putting off for a while – why not take the opportunity to explore an area you have an interest in?
- Discover a new podcast. Podcasts are a great way to learn new things – there's practically a podcast for every subject imaginable! There are lots too with general advice on health and wellbeing, such as 'The Food Medic Podcast' with Dr Hazel Wallace or 'Feel Better, Live More' with Dr Rangan Chatterjee.



## GIVE

Research has shown that acts of kindness can help to improve our mental wellbeing – helping us to connect with people and giving us a sense of purpose, self-worth and self-esteem. According to the **Mental Health Foundation**, it can also promote changes in the brain that are linked with happiness.

- Offer to go shopping for a friend, family member or neighbour. Lockdown restrictions can make this a challenge for some – it's a simple act that they will be grateful to receive.
- Volunteer. It doesn't need to be too challenging or time consuming – check in with local organisations to see what support your local community might need.
- Give your time to a colleague. Ask them how they're doing and really listen to what they have to say.
- Give time to yourself. We rarely stop to think about our own wellbeing. It's OK to think about ourselves from time to time. Take some time out to do something you enjoy. It's a simple thing that we often forget to do.

For more information on supporting your wellbeing, visit the Inspire Support Hub at: [www.inspiresupporthub.org](http://www.inspiresupporthub.org)



## References and Resources:

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Andrew Kinder, Author, Positive Male Mind:  
[www.eapa.org.uk/impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-male-mental-health/](http://www.eapa.org.uk/impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-male-mental-health/)

HSE Advice on mind your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak:  
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Mental Health Ireland, 5 Ways for Tough Times:  
[www.mentalhealthireland.ie/get-support/covid19/](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/get-support/covid19/)

Mental Health Ireland, 5 Way to Wellbeing  
[www.mentalhealthireland.ie/five-ways-to-wellbeing/](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/five-ways-to-wellbeing/)

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[www.mindingyourhead.info/looking-after-your-mental-and-emotional-wellbeing](http://www.mindingyourhead.info/looking-after-your-mental-and-emotional-wellbeing)

Mind, Coronavirus and your mental health  
[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/)

HSE, physical activity guidelines:  
[www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/physical-activity-guidelines/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/physical-activity-guidelines/)

Mental Health Foundation, Kindness:  
[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week/kindness-matters-guide](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week/kindness-matters-guide)