BUBBLING OVER? MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

As the global pandemic takes hold, for many of us our mental health has been impacted. This poster visualises mental health during this period to help us make sense of what we may be feeling.

This visualisation is an adaptation of the jam-jar metaphor\(^1\) for mental health. Once the vessel is full, a person has no more room to cope with environmental stress and feelings may 'bubble over' leading to a psychiatric episode. By building coping strategies, we can learn to adapt, prioritise our health and grow the size of the flask. The exact mix of factors that are in the flask vary person to person.

Prior to the Pandemic:

- The beaker can still overflow during normal life when our mental health takes a hit.
- Factors that influence overall wellbeing kept under control due to self-care practices.

During the Pandemic:

- Physical exercise may have been a coping strategy that is now limited.
- Change in schedule may lead to increased depression usually kept under control.
- The mental load has increased taking up more space in the flask.
- Anxiety increased due to pandemic and barrage of news.

Some tips to manage your mental health during COVID-19 (and prevent the flask getting full):

- **Speak to a professional**
  - Speak to a medical professional about how you are feeling. Your feelings are valid irrespective of a pandemic. This may lead to interventions such as medication or counseling to help you manage your mental health.

- **Focus on what you can control**
  - In a time where many things feel out of our control focusing on what we "can" control can help us be less anxious and worried. We can then channel that energy into other areas.

- **Make time for exercise**
  - Endorphins released during sport can lift our mood. If it's getting outside for a run, or lifting the bars of a gym in the house, or stretching, doing a little bit of exercise is important.

- **Create a schedule**
  - By planning your days you can concentrate on the things you "can" control. The important thing here is to give yourself both a degree of accountability, yet be forgiving if you don't achieve everything you aim for.

- **Communicate with others**
  - Talk through how you are feeling with others. Reach out to loved ones and make sure to stay connected during this time. There are a range of support groups and forums online.

- **Productivity comes second**
  - We must recognise that basic needs like food, health and family need to come first during this time. Only then can we be productive. Let people know if you are struggling to hit deadlines.

- **Learn something new**
  - If you have the capacity to, learning a new hobby or skill to destress over this period may be a way to help you manage your feelings and distract you from what is happening.

- **Let go of the guilt**
  - Even if it's just a minute per day, taking the time to reflect, be present, and relax can be incredibly calming. There are some excellent apps available to get you started.

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**Self-harming?**

**Suicidal thoughts?**

**Need help?**

**CALL CAPS at 1-919-966-3658 (24/7)**

**National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)**

Find more about the Jam-Jar concept for mental health here:

1. [https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/mental-health-and-me/depression](https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/mental-health-and-me/depression)

Part of the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoë Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.