

THIS WAY UP ↑↑

Helping You Take Care of Your Mental Health

Tips for Getting Through

The COVID-19 Marathon



Tips for Getting Through the COVID-19 Marathon

None of us have anticipated what 2020 would have in store when the COVID-19 pandemic landed on our doorstep and disrupted life as we knew it.

From the ongoing threat to our health, to the enormously challenging lockdowns, job losses, and isolation, what we hoped may have been a sprint, has well and truly turned into a long and painful marathon.

Many of us are grappling with physical, psychological, social, and financial effects of the pandemic and we've all had to adjust to facing uncertainty about what the future holds.

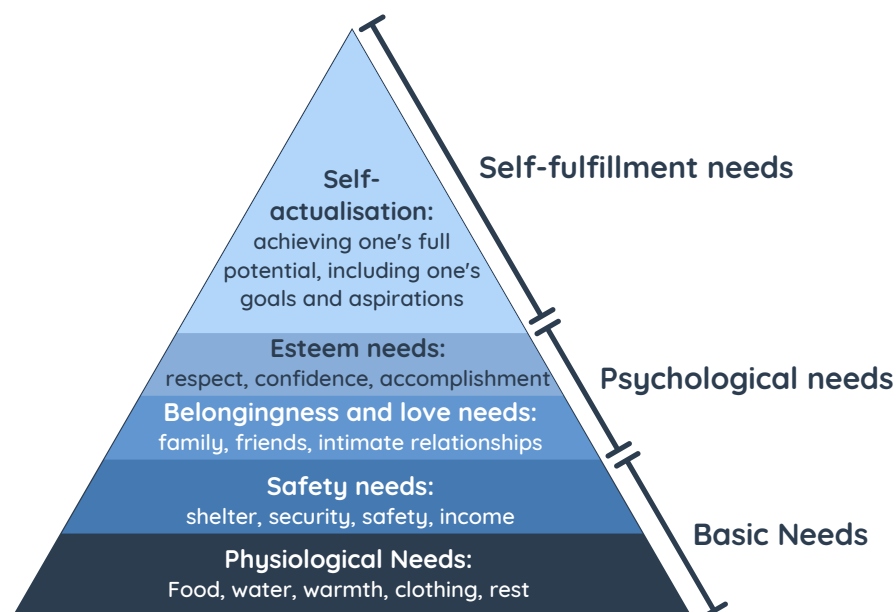
So what can we do to look after ourselves during this ongoing global challenge?

First, let's take a look at the reason why dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic may be particularly challenging from our mental health point of view.

Meeting Our Fundamental Needs During COVID-19

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) theory says that human beings have universal needs, which when met, **contribute to our sense of well-being**.

The more fundamental needs are down the bottom, such as basic needs for food, water, shelter and safety. Next there are psychological needs such as feeling a sense of belonging, connectedness and being respected. Then, at the top is the need for self-fulfilment and achieving our life goals and aspirations.



This pandemic has threatened our ability to meet our needs, which has in turn affected our sense of well-being.

It's caused us to feel unsafe as we worry about contracting COVID-19. It has also caused job insecurity and worries about accessing or affording essentials like food, toilet paper, and housing. We have become more socially isolated and can't pursue the opportunities we value or follow through with the plans that were important to us.

It's become harder to fulfil our different needs and it is only natural for us to wonder when this pandemic will finally end.

Training for the COVID-19 Marathon

It can feel like we're in the midst of a marathon, but without knowing where the finish line is or when we'll reach it. **It's not a marathon we signed up for, but here we are on the track and we need to find ways to keep going.**

When so much is out of our control, it can help to focus on the things we can do to build resilience and prepare ourselves to go the distance.

Here are 10 tips to help you get through this marathon:

1. Acknowledge your experience of the pandemic

Acknowledge your own experience of how this pandemic has affected you. COVID-19 presents each person with their own set of hurdles, so try not to compare your situation to that of others, and focus on what you can do to get through this.

Give yourself permission to feel what you feel, without criticising yourself or minimising how you feel. Keep an eye out for thoughts like "I'm being weak, I shouldn't be upset about this" or "It's not a big deal, others have it worse than me".

It is possible to maintain perspective and be empathic to the plight of others **and** acknowledge the difficulties of your own circumstances at the same time.

2. Identify and use your personal strengths

Each person has their unique strengths. **Take a moment to reflect on what your strengths are**, or on what others have told you they've noticed about you.

It might be a determined spirit, positive attitude, problem solving, creative thinking, sense of humour or resourcefulness. The list is endless.



While you haven't lived through a pandemic before, you may have been through and coped with difficult times in the past.

What personal strengths helped you then, or what could you muster up now to face these challenges?

You can play to the strengths you already have, or cultivate some new ones to help you encounter this marathon's unexpected twists and turns.

3. Build up your stamina by taking extra care of your body

To last the distance, you need your energy tank to be as full as possible, so make sure that you top it up regularly. Here's how:



Try to **create and maintain a positive routine** of healthy eating, good sleep, and adequate exercise, all of which provide the essential fuel for both your body and mind.



Seek medical attention early for any health concerns, coronavirus-related or otherwise. If you have chronic physical or mental health issues, **continue to treat them**.



Be mindful of alcohol and drugs, which might provide a temporary sense of relief, but if you become dependent on them, they could create more problems and make things extra difficult for you.



Take care of yourself so you can care for others. If you ignore your own needs, you risk burning out.

4. Keep stress at bay in helpful ways

Being in a marathon can feel overwhelming and thinking too far ahead or wondering when it will end only makes it harder to keep going. **Here is what you can do instead:**

- ▶ Focus on just getting to the next bit - like getting through one day at a time or breaking up tasks into smaller and more manageable parts.
- ▶ Keep your thoughts in check and challenge them so you can think in a more balanced, realistic, and helpful way.
- ▶ Structure your daily activities to give yourself a break from worry and shift your attention to something else.
- ▶ If you're stressed about a problem that can be fixed, don't delay taking manageable steps to address it. Putting things off tends to make anxiety worse.

If you need some help, download our 'Focusing on Solutions' guide.

Access the 'Focusing on Solutions' Resource



5. Create opportunities to experience positive emotions

It's natural for our mood to dip during this time. To prevent negativity from spiralling further, we can level out our mood by deliberately finding ways to increase positive emotions.

Every day, plan, schedule, and make sure you do:

- at least one activity that is **fun, pleasurable, relaxing or enjoyable**, and
- at least one activity that gives you a sense of **productivity, achievement, meaning or satisfaction**.

It doesn't matter how big or small these activities are, the important thing is that they bring you a sense of joy - even if only for a few minutes.

If COVID-19 restrictions are getting in the way of doing things you usually do, be flexible and creative in finding alternatives. This will help boost your mood so that you can persevere more easily.

6. Keep an eye on what you watch, read, and follow

It's worrying to read statistics of infections, deaths, and outbreaks near you. It's distressing to see global images of sick people, overrun hospitals, and coffins. And it's tiring to be bombarded with people's arguments and opinions on social media.

There are two extremes of managing your exposure to the media, **both of which can be unhelpful in the long run**: avoiding the media altogether or checking for news obsessively.

Instead, try to **strike a balance** where you **consume enough so you can keep up-to-date, follow health advice, and modify your plans if needed**, but not so much that you feel completely drained and overwhelmed every time you turn on the TV or pick up your phone.

7. Balance what you think and talk about

Similarly, **try to strike a balance** between acknowledging the current reality of living through a pandemic and focusing on other important or meaningful aspects of your life.

It's normal to think and talk about COVID-19 a lot when it has affected our lives so much, but try not to let it consume your thoughts or dominate all of your social interactions. **Consciously shifting your thoughts** and focusing on other things can help you stay level headed and preserve a feeling of normality.

8. Stay connected and continue to strengthen your relationships

It's natural to grieve the lost freedom to socialise, hang out, and see our loved ones face-to-face. Social distancing, quarantine, and border closures have made this pandemic incredibly isolating. **Here are some things you can do to cope so you can keep going**:

- ▶ Invest in strengthening relationships within your household. Spend quality time with the people you live with, plan enjoyable activities, and do what you can to take your mind off the difficulties you are all facing.
- ▶ Keep in touch via phone and video calls, regularly. Even if you aren't feeling particularly lonely, look out for those around you who are more vulnerable to isolation.
- ▶ If restrictions allow you to see others, openly communicate and negotiate ahead of time about what you and others are comfortable doing and where you are comfortable going. This will ensure everyone's preferences are being heard and considered while planning.

9. Take extra good care of yourself while in lockdown

Whether it's 14 days in isolation or a lockdown that goes on for weeks or months, quarantine is incredibly challenging.

Be kind and compassionate with yourself and those you live with. If you are living alone, staying connected is even more crucial. **Take one day at a time, or even one hour at a time** when the going gets tough.

Experiment with different strategies and keep doing what works well for you and your household. It is especially important that you invest in your mental health.

10. Cheer yourself on, but reach out for support when you need to

It's important to be kind and to cheer yourself on as you continue to endure this incredibly challenging and uncertain time.

Look for small wins each day, like tasks you've achieved or tricky situations you got through. Give yourself praise, reassurance, and encouragement regularly.

However, be honest with yourself if you're struggling. **No one is supposed to tough this out on their own**, so if you need a bit of a boost, don't delay reaching out for some support. It can be a bit easier to keep going when others are alongside you.

Share how you feel with a family member, friend, colleague, your GP or a mental health clinician, and do this early on so that you don't run out of steam on your own.

Here is what you can do if you feel like the COVID-19 Marathon is starting to take a toll:

- Explore our free online tools to help you cope with different aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic here: <https://covid19.thiswayup.org.au>
- Make a time to chat with your GP - pandemic stress can be extra hard to deal with if you have a pre-existing mental health condition, so work with your clinician around staying well and preventing relapse.
- Consider doing an online self-help course to learn practical strategies for dealing with stress, anxiety, and low mood - you can find a range of scientifically-supported courses here: <https://thiswayup.org.au/courses/>



To access additional tools for coping with stress and anxiety during the corona virus outbreak, please visit our website.

www.thiswayup.org.au/coronavirus



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