



Royal Flying
Doctor Service

QUEENSLAND SECTION

TIPS TO Cope with lockdown

FROM THE FLYING DOCTOR



Many of us know this feeling – it might hit us on day three of an unexpected ‘holiday’.

You went to bed pretty late last night – after watching three Netflix shows one after the other. The next day, you woke up feeling sluggish. No need to shave, no need to get dressed for a while.

Quarantine time can somehow seem different. But in the back of your mind, you start to ask yourself – ‘why am I feeling this way?’

This is quite a typical scenario for someone caught up in this COVID-19 isolation blitz. These emotions and reactions are normal. Another way to think of it is as an adaptation phase. The routines we previously used to keep ourselves on track have been disrupted and some of the safety that we took for granted has been displaced.

So, it is normal and we might just be taking a well-earned break. If this phase lasts for more than a few days it can become problematic. Let’s think about why.

Remember this – the situation we are all going through, the uncertainty, our worries about loved ones, and particularly the media frenzy – is actually incredibly stressful.

So what happens in human brains when stressors impact our lives? Here are some of our possible responses:

‘Push through it’: We push ourselves to get through it.

‘Cope with it’: We use tried and true coping strategies that have helped us out over the years.

‘Fix it’: We get our brain in gear to problem solve and fix the cause of the stress.

‘Adapt it’: We adapt or develop new techniques to get us through.

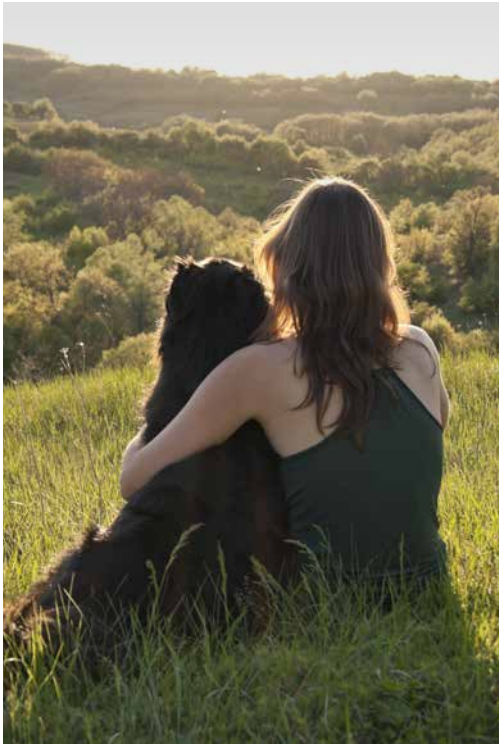
But what happens if we get stuck?

In the case I am referring to, we might get stuck in a ‘cope with it’ response; a coping strategy or withdrawal loop that helps us deal with stress by avoiding it for a while.

We might be taking a break by reading a fantasy novel or get stuck binge watching a show we really don’t care much about. It takes our mind off the problem. We might be using distraction, very effectively, to give our minds and body a chance to regroup, recover some energy, and be ready to go back out for the second half.

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However, we might also find that when we poke our heads up from the couch again, the stressors are still there, they are still real, and we are nowhere closer to using the 'fix it' or 'adapt it' responses than we were before.

It is at times like these that the human mind can find itself vulnerable to some mental health problems:

- > Exhaustion due to stress (and overuse of the 'push through it' response).
- > Feeling stuck or apathy which can lead to depression (including overuse of avoidance/distraction strategies from the 'cope with it' response).
- > Anxiety due to being depleted and unable to put the 'fix it' and 'adapt it' responses into action.

This is why advice about managing the challenges and anxiety triggered by COVID initially focuses on self-care.

Self-care is an active response to challenges. It isn't about sitting back or taking an easy route.

Self-care includes:

- > Reaching out to and sharing your feelings with others
- > Normalising your responses so you can understand them as not inevitable but contingent responses to stressors
- > Looking after your body and your mind with stress breaks and fitness breaks; and
- > The key in this instance – creating new routines.

Most importantly, self-care helps us re-align with the values we hold and the things we care about.

If we find ourselves thinking 'I can't handle this', we need to step back, treat ourselves kindly and re-connect via actions that reflect what we value.



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