

Looking after your mental wellbeing

During our response to Covid 19, many of us will be feeling anxious, uncertain or overwhelmed. Remember we are all in this together. The Wellbeing Special Interest Group has some tips to help you carry on and to look after yourself. [See attached checklist.](#)

Look after yourself physically

- Eat healthy food. Try to limit caffeine and alcohol. Drink water.
- Exercise. Try online fitness, yoga, dance classes.
- Prioritise sleep (if you are having trouble sleeping [click here](#)).
- Your normal schedule will change. Maintain at least some of your routine and make new routines to help ground you.

Look after yourself mentally

- Take a break away from the clinical area.
- Limit checking in with news/social media. Stick to reputable sources.
- Speak to a colleague or check in with your buddy [click here](#).
- Stay connected with family and friends. Try Zoom, Face-Time, Skype.
- Accept gratitude and focus on what went well.
- Be kind to others. Be kind to yourself.
- Take pride in the service you are providing to others.

Some of us will be at risk of mental ill health. What should we be looking out for?

Severe anxiety

- May induce intense fear, diminished concentration, memory difficulties, problems with decision making and physical symptoms like tremor, nausea, sweating.
- Seek help: your mentor, wellbeing advocate, GP or psychologist/psychiatrist ([click here](#) for more information).

Depression

- May be revealed as diminished concentration, memory loss, difficulty making decisions, gloomy thoughts, tearfulness, appetite and sleep problems, self-harm or suicidal thoughts.
- Seek urgent medical help ([click here](#) for more information).

Other Concerns

- Personal Safety ([click here](#)).
- Families with children ([click here](#)).
- Finances ([click here](#)).
- Legal precautions and managing loss ([click here](#)).

Need support now?

Converge International 1300 687 327 (NZ: +613 8620 5300)

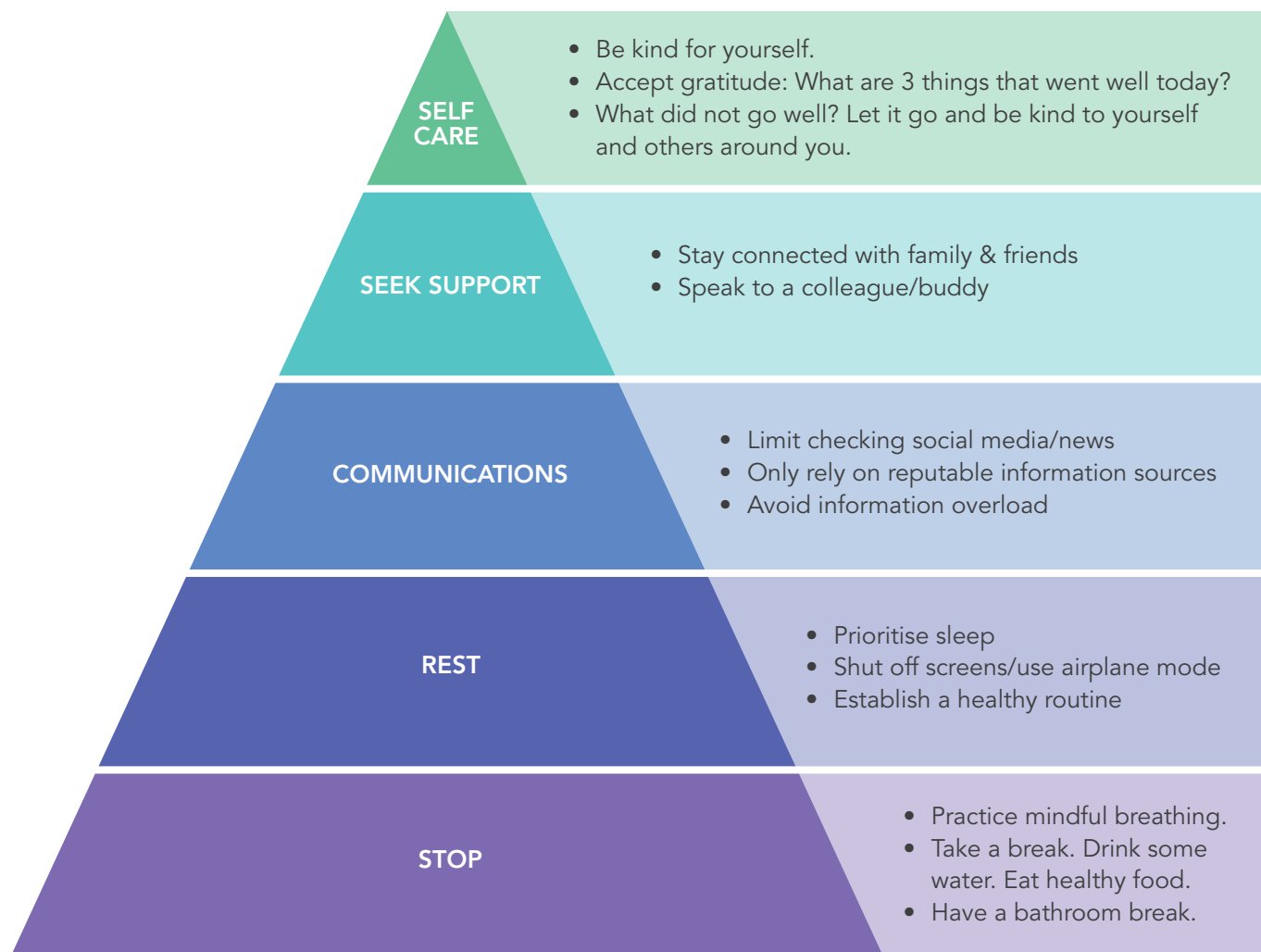
Lifeline 13 11 44

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

WELLBEING SIG



As anaesthetists, we are all used to checklists. Here's a wellbeing checklist adapted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs:



Sleep

If insomnia is a problem, what can help?:

- No screens for 1 hour before bedtime. The blue light from phones and tablets simulates daylight and wakes us up. And the content may trigger excitement/anxiety/anger.
- Ensure the room you sleep is quiet and relaxing.
- If sleep doesn't happen within 20 minutes, rise and do something relaxing such as read, listen to music, drawing, until you feel sleepy.
- If you start worrying, try writing the worries down to get them out of your head. Decide to deal with the worry in the morning.
- Try a meditation technique such as focusing on the breathing or gradually relaxing your body bit by bit.

Checking in with your work buddy

We are facing an unprecedented time of uncertainty and change during the current global Covid-19 pandemic. This can result in:

- Safety concerns for yourself and you family
- Increased work demands and stress
- Feelings of isolation and even stigmatisation
- Insomnia
- Maladaptive coping strategies such as increased alcohol use

A buddy is colleague with whom you can debrief, be a shoulder to lean on or a resource to help. Try not to have more than 2 buddies per person.

How does it work?

Make time at least once a week to check in with one another.

Questions to get you started:

1. Are you okay?
2. How is life at home?
3. Do you have everything you need?
4. Do you need assistance with childcare?
5. Are there any stressors I can help you address?
6. Are there any extra resources you would like to support you?
7. What has been the biggest challenge this week?
8. What has been the best part of your week?

Anxiety and depression

It is normal to be worried about the current circumstances:

- Will I become ill?
- What about my family?
- What will I do about my job, finances?
- How do I manage with children at home?

It's easy to be sucked in by these worries, constantly revisiting them. A simple way to short circuit this is:

- Notice when you are worried. This is the most difficult step. The worries seem so real, yet they are simply our imagination going overboard. They are made up, not fact.
- Consider that worrying doesn't make a difference to resolving things.
- Focus your attention on the present moment.
- Continue with the task at hand.

The worries may return, but this technique, mindfulness or meditation can help you to step back and then be present.

Severe anxiety

May induce:

- Intense fear, diminished concentration, memory difficulties, problem making decisions.
- You may notice physical symptoms - palpitations, sweating, tremor, nausea, dizzy feelings, odd sensations.
- It is important to notice if feelings of intense fear are connected to an unsafe work situation. This can be realistic fear that needs action in the same way that abdominal pain may be a symptom of appendicitis and requires surgery to prevent peritonitis.

Depression

Is indicated by:

- Feeling down, diminished concentration, memory difficulties, difficulty making decisions, low energy, tearful, gloomy thoughts, appetite decreased or increased, change in weight, sleep problems, nightmares, thoughts that life is not worth living, thoughts of self harm, suicidal thoughts.
- Insomnia - difficulty falling asleep, and/ or waking during sleep, and/or early awakening.
- Thoughts of self harm, suicidal thoughts - wish to die, wish to join a deceased loved one but without a particular plan. If you have suicidal thoughts with or without a plan, it is urgent that you seek medical help.

Traumatic symptoms

- Intrusive thoughts of a distressing work event e.g. a patient's death. Nightmares about the event.
- Feeling physically and psychologically distressed when something reminds you of the event, trouble remembering important parts of the event, very negative beliefs about yourself, others or the world, persistently blaming yourself or others for what happened.
- Persistently feeling negative, angry, guilty or ashamed.
- Feeling less interested in doing things you used to enjoy.
- Feeling cut off from others.
- Having trouble feeling positive emotions (e.g. love or excitement).
- Difficulties sleeping.

- Easily angered or irritated.
- Engaging in reckless or self-destructive behaviour.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Feeling on guard or vigilant.
- Easily startled.

If you have noticed any of the above, do the following:

- People who can assist you to get help include your welfare advocate, mentor, your buddy, family, peers.
- Milder symptoms may be treated by your GP who may refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist.
- If your symptoms are severe and particularly if you have suicidal thoughts consult a psychiatrist.

Personal safety

- Use the appropriate safety equipment and avoid patient contact without it.
- Consider if you are in a high risk group e.g. age, comorbidity, pregnancy, immunosuppressed. If so, stick to non-clinical duties or consider long service leave.
- If in your work situation you are not provided with adequate safety equipment e.g. masks, gowns etc., your fear is alerting you to an unsafe situation and your health is the first priority.
- We must value our own health and wellbeing first, in order to work safely and survive for our own sake, our family, and to be able to continue to help our patients.

Families with children

With the closure of schools and child care facilities, comes a number of concerns:

- Their safety in the event you are exposed to the virus
 - It appears that children are at much lower risk than adults.
 - Showering prior to leaving work or alternatively showering and washing clothes immediately on arrival at home may reduce spread.
- Child care
 - It may be inadvisable to have grandparents in direct contact with unquarantined children as well as those with comorbidities or immunocompromised.
 - You could consider using out of work child care workers or others you may know who have lost work.
 - childcareconnect.com.au is a website set up for healthcare workers to link with university students who can provide child care.
 - education.govt.nz/covid-19/home-based-care-options-for-children-aged-0-14-of-essential-workers is a New Zealand website for childcare options for essential workers.
- Talking to kids about the pandemic
 - Allow them to talk and ask questions to ensure they have the correct information.
 - Give factual information but adjust it to fit their age and provide some encouragement such as “doctors are working hard on a vaccine”.
 - Answer questions appropriately but given we don’t know all the answers yet, be truthful about that.
 - Seek out other parents to help allay your worries.
 - Give practical advice about washings hands and coughing/sneezing.
- Home schooling
 - Routines can be useful such as keeping to (some) school times, uniforms and packed lunches.
 - Exercise.
 - Time out if its all becoming too stressful.
 - Teach other skills such as gardening, cooking, woodwork.

Financial issues

Many of you will find yourselves or your partners suddenly underemployed or even unemployed. It may seem obvious, but the stress caused by this can make you forget to:

- Speak to your accountant, who may be more up to date than you with regard to the government’s financial packages.
- Check in with your bank or lender.
- Seek advice from your financial advisor.
- Avoid sudden or rash decisions where money is concerned.
- Consider there may be other avenues of employment you or your partner could seek.

Legal precautions and managing loss

This may be an unpalatable subject for some, but it is worth considering preparing for the worst:

- Make a will. This can save enormous legal problems in the event of death.
- Consider a power of attorney if you are severely disabled.
- An advanced care directive could be worthwhile for older doctors.

Many of us have and will have a sense of loss with regard to our jobs, our routines, our families, and even our loved ones or colleagues:

- It is normal to feel sad/angry/lost.
- Give yourself permission to feel the emotions as they arise.
- Try to focus on the things that you can do, particularly if confined, rather than the things you can't do.

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