

Looking after your emotional wellbeing

We are living through a difficult time and the changes we have experienced in our daily lives can result in differences in our thoughts, our mood or in the way we act.

You may be feeling anxious about catching coronavirus, worried about family and friends, stressed about work and money, or are struggling to cope with your axial SpA (AS).

You may feel grief, fear, anger, loneliness, or sadness. In these difficult and uncertain times it is natural to have these feelings - so try not to judge yourself on how you are feeling.

It is important to care for yourself emotionally, so that you are better able to take care of your axial SpA (AS).

We've put together a few tips. Not all will appeal to you or will work for you but there might be one or two which help you or someone you know.

Keeping CALM

Using CALM may help you to take care of your feelings, your body, your thoughts and what you are doing.

CALMING ACTIVITIES

These are things you can do to help yourself feel a bit better. It helps if you do them regularly, not just when you are feeling overwhelmed. You can do them on your own or with others.

Think about things that make you feel better – going for a walk, baking, listening to music. Make a list and try to do one thing off your list each day.

Try Mindfulness. We have an introduction to Mindfulness on our website on the My AS My Life page.

ATTENDING TO YOUR BASIC NEEDS

These are things that your body needs to keep well. Looking after your body

and keeping your axial SpA (AS) symptoms under control can have a big impact on how you feel emotionally.

- Make sure you get enough sleep at a regular time of day.
- Do some stretching and keep physically active.
- Think about what you are eating and drinking.
- Plan your day and vary your activities so fatigue doesn't take over. Do contact us if you'd like our fatigue guide posting to you.

LEARNING TO RE-THINK

Our brains are very good at worrying, especially when things are different or uncertain. It can be easy to get stuck thinking negatively. You can manage your thinking and this can improve your wellbeing.

- Avoid rumours and stick to sources of information you can trust.
- Limit the amount of time you watch or listen to the news.
- Focus on the here and now, and on things you can do - it can be easy to worry about things outside of our control. This takes us back to Mindfulness!
- Do something to take your mind off things, to distract you, something you are good at or enjoy.

MAKING YOURSELF FEEL GOOD

There are things you can do to make yourself feel better. It is OK to laugh and enjoy yourself, even when things are difficult and different.

Spot the positives

We can all think too much about what goes wrong. We get stuck on the negative. Practicing to notice the positives can help. At the end of the day, think of three things that went well. They can be big things or small things. Think about why they were good and what they mean to you then use a notebook or laptop to write them down.

Make a Joy Jar

Having something to look forward to is important. However, many of the things we have been looking forward to feel uncertain or out of reach for the moment.

Creating a "Joy Jar" may help you with some of these feelings and will be something to look forward to.

Find a jar at home, decorate it with stickers or paint it, and make a little hole in the lid. When you feel you are missing something or think of something you really want to do, grab a scrap of paper and write your thought down and post it in the jar. Commit to doing each idea and really enjoying it, once you are able to.

Expressing gratitude

Over the last few months, many of us were on our doorsteps clapping on, to say thank you to the NHS. Expressing gratitude is a powerful act. It makes us notice what we have.

Stop for a moment and slow your breathing. Close your eyes. Think about what you are grateful for. What are you lucky to have in your life? What do you feel thankful for? Focus on what comes to mind, notice how it makes you feel and say it out loud if you wish.

Remember it's OK to ask for help if you need it.

Mind promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems. You can call 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm).

Samaritans is a confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair. You can call 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline).