



# Pandemic Fatigue

Feb 2022

# What is pandemic fatigue?

Pandemic fatigue is defined as “demotivation to follow recommended protective behaviours, emerging gradually over time and affected by a number of emotions, experiences and perception” (World Health Organisation, 2020). It is an understandable and natural reaction to the seemingly endless stringent measures. You may consider it as a kind of burnout or chronic stress during a prolonged public health crisis; when the preventive measures to tackle the pandemic disrupt all aspects of our lives.

## What causes it?

The uncertainties around COVID-19, the constant changes around the restriction policies, and seemingly never ending waves of cases can make us feel tired and exhausted. It is normal to feel fatigued and emotionally drained over what is happening, such as the social distancing measures, cancellation of plans and gatherings, 24/7 streaming news, and fear of the virus, can all add up to induce a high level of stress.

Being stuck in the perpetual routine of wearing masks can be difficult. **It is important for you to know that whatever you are feeling right now, your emotions are valid.** Adherence and adaptation of public health interventions and rules to control the pandemic require sufficient control and mental effort, which can be taxing on our wellbeing.

# What are the signs of pandemic fatigue?

We may notice different symptoms when we are experiencing pandemic fatigue. Sometimes you might be able to tell right away when you are feeling stressed, but other times you might keep going without recognising the signs. Stress can affect you both emotionally and physically, and can also affect the way you behave. Here are some of the signs that you might be experiencing pandemic fatigue:

- Being less effective or less focused at work/school
- Increased level of anxiety and vigilance
- Not complying with COVID-19 rules and measures, such as washing your hands, wearing a mask and social distancing.
- Getting tired of hearing anything related to the COVID-19
- Lacking the motivation to do anything

## You may feel...

- Irritated and impatient
- Apathetic towards the current situation
- Tired, even after getting enough sleep
- Depressed
- Lonely and isolated
- Emotionally exhausted and cynical about the future

**Note:** These are just examples of symptoms of pandemic fatigue. Not everyone who has developed pandemic fatigue experiences all the above symptoms; some cases can be mild. If you feel like it has impacted your life or you feel distressed, you may consider seeking professional help: [mind.org.hk/getting-help/](https://www.mind.org.hk/getting-help/)

# How does pandemic fatigue affect our mental health?

Although pandemic fatigue itself is not a diagnosable mental health problem, it can have a significant impact on your mental health. Being in a constant state of pandemic burnout or stress, without managing it, can lead to a mental health problem or exacerbate existing symptoms. People who experience unmanaged pandemic fatigue may find it harder to regulate their emotions and cope with daily stress.

## What can we do to manage and prevent pandemic fatigue?

It is important to intervene early before the symptoms get worse. If you notice any symptoms of pandemic fatigue, here are different ways to help combat pandemic fatigue:

- **Recognise and acknowledge your emotions and feelings.** It is normal to feel this way; this is a natural response to prolonged stress. You are not alone. Recognise your feelings and emotions and acknowledge their impact on your everyday life.
- **Take a break from the pandemic.** If you feel frustrated, overwhelmed and stressed about the pandemic, take a break from it. For instance, take a break from social media scrolling. Instead, distract yourself and engage in other activities that bring you joy, pleasure, or comfort.



- **Be compassionate.** These are unprecedented times for everyone. In the face of increased pressure, we may find ourselves less patient and more irritable. We might even snap and take it out on people around us when the situation becomes too tense. If this is the case, apologise to those on the receiving end and let them know you are frustrated because of the situation, not personally or intentionally. We can all take a step further and be more patient with people around us, including acquaintances or strangers; [we all need more compassion during difficult times.](#)
- **Remain hopeful.** Although the situation seems to be never-ending and hopeless at times, [it is okay to hope for the best when we are prepared for the worst.](#) Accept the fact that there are things beyond our control, and focus on what you can do to manage your worries and concerns.
- **We are all in this together.** A silver lining to the pandemic is that [we are all together to support each other,](#) no matter who you are. Give yourself (and people around you) a pat on the back for your efforts and persistence in the long and ever-changing journey of the pandemic.
- **Fill out our COVID-19 self help guide to get a better understanding of what is going on and what you need to do:** [mind.org.hk/covid-19-self-help-guide/](https://mind.org.hk/covid-19-self-help-guide/)



# Take care of your wellbeing

Taking care of your well-being helps you minimise the impact of stress and build up your resilience. Resilience is your ability to bounce back and adapt in the face of life's challenges. This is a learnt behaviour and it's something that we can all take steps to achieve:

- **Maintain a healthy routine and take care of your physical health.** Get enough sleep, eat regular nutritious meals, and stay active. Maintaining a healthy routine is especially important if you are currently working remotely.
- **Stay active.** Try to move your body each day and avoid sitting for long periods (even if indoors), as exercise elevates your mood and lowers stress. Learn more about the benefits of exercise on physical and mental health here: [www.moveithk.com/health-benefits](http://www.moveithk.com/health-benefits)
- **Try breathing exercises and stretching to relax your mind and body.** There are online videos and apps that provide comprehensive guidance on carrying out breathing exercises and stretching your muscles. Or even do a short yoga class!
- **Connect with others.** Spend time connecting with your loved ones, even if it's virtual. Check-in with how they have been; be present and enjoy the quality time spent together. Having a supportive network is essential in protecting our mental health, especially in times of stress - it is important for us to know that we are not alone to face adversities.



## How can friends and family support individuals who are experiencing pandemic fatigue?

Although there are a lot of uncertainties and many things that are out of our control, there are many practical steps you can take to support the people around you who are experiencing pandemic fatigue:

- **Keep in touch with friends and loved ones on a regular basis.** Make an effort to catch up over a cup of coffee or even a simple phone call - ask them about how they are getting on. They will be able to feel your concern and sincerity from the time you spend with them.
- **Help them identify their triggers.** Sometimes they might not be aware of the signs of stress, and in this case, signs of pandemic fatigue. You can talk to them about the signs of distress you have observed, and discuss potential stressors or ways to manage them.
- **Be open-minded.** Different people experience things differently, and it is valid to them. Listen to them with an open mind, with a non-judgemental and empathetic attitude. Being an active listener can make a difference.

- **Validate and reassure their emotions.** Reassure them it is natural to have these feelings and emotions during challenging times, and it is okay to not be okay. Let them know that you are there to support them, and they are not alone in facing these problems.
- **Trust and respect them.** Sometimes we are eager to solve the problems for them, with good intentions to ease their mind. However, how we may manage the situation ourselves, might not be right for them, remind yourself that they are in control of their experience and decision, and respect their choices.
- **Show appreciation to your loved ones.** Remind them from time to time of how important they are to you. Very often, a simple 'How are you?' or 'I'm glad that you are in my life' message shows that you care and value them.



## What we can do

It is important to recognise our limits, and things that we can't control, and focus on what we can do. Learning more about how the virus may affect ourselves and others, and different protective measures to minimise the chance of contracting disease, can increase our self-efficacy; a belief that we are able to protect ourselves in specific situations, like the current health crises. Increasing our levels of **self-efficacy** can be a great way to combat pandemic fatigue, and stay motivated to continue managing challenges brought on by the pandemic, which is a key protective factor for our mental health.

Take care of yourself and remember, when it comes to health, **both our physical and mental health matters** - as you navigate time, take the extra time to check in on your overall wellbeing.



# About Mind HK

Mind HK (Mind Mental Health Hong Kong Limited) is a S88 registered charity (91/16471), which launched in 2017. Our vision is to ensure no one in Hong Kong has to face a mental health problem alone. Through resources, training, and outreach campaigns and programmes, we help to educate around mental health and remove the associate stigma, with the aim of achieving the best mental health for all in Hong Kong. With existing collaboration and research efforts, we are here to support Hong Kong in becoming a global leader and regional model for public mental health. For more on our work, mission and vision, please visit [www.mind.org.hk](http://www.mind.org.hk).

## Useful Resources

If you want to learn more about other mental health topics, please visit **our Mental Health A to Z:**

[www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/](http://www.mind.org.hk/mental-health-a-to-z/)

**COVID-19 resources:**

- [COVID-19 Mental Health Tips](#)
- [Mandatory Isolation Tips](#)
- [Pandemic Fatigue](#)
- [COVID-19 self-help guide](#)

**If you are in an emergency or crisis situation, please contact 999, or go to your nearest A&E.**

**More local urgent support in Hong Kong:**  
[mind.org.hk/find-help-now](http://mind.org.hk/find-help-now)

**More non-urgent support can be found here:**  
[mind.org.hk/community-directory/](http://mind.org.hk/community-directory/)

**How & where to seek help in Hong Kong:**  
[mind.org.hk/getting-help/](http://mind.org.hk/getting-help/)



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