Managing stress and mental health

While we face COVID-19 together we acknowledge that many of us have understandable stress and worries. Managing stress levels and mental health is a task that many of us will need to tend to. Below are a few general guidelines and suggestions.

Unfortunately, stress is normal. We evolved stress and anxiety to help us stay alert, energised and focused. Some extra anxiety and worry is unavoidable during a time like this.

Know your own signs of elevated stress and anxiety (e.g., irritability, tension, excessive worries). Persistent high stress can become exhaustion and burnout. Monitor your own wellbeing.

Focus on actions that you can control and that will help calm your body and mind. We cannot be relaxed and stressed at the same time.

Look after your body. Exercise is an excellent way to discharge the nervous energy of “fight/flight”. Get enough sleep, eat well and avoid excessive alcohol and drugs.

Drop into your body. Use your body and five senses to lower arousal. Pause. Come back into your body (e.g., pushing pressure with your feet into the floor, straighten your spine, stretch, drop your shoulders). Notice bodily sensations. Take a breath through your nose. Hold. Exhale. Hold. Repeat.

Notice and name your thoughts and feelings rather than pushing them away. Label them with language (e.g., “I am feeling scared, on edge, lonely”). This helps activate soothing pathways in your brain and helps a feeling pass.

Notice what is going well. Remind yourself of 5 things/people/qualities that you are grateful for. Gratitude helps balance what your brain pays attention to and is associated with improved mood, sleep and relationships.

Use what has helped in the past. You will have got through tough times before. Remember your own character strengths and past ways of coping.

Pause and get in contact with the present. Notice what you can see, smell, hear, feel (e.g., warmth, cool, touch). Listen to the sounds of nature. The brain’s soothing pathways help settle the “fight/flight” part. It can be done formally (e.g., Smiling Mind app) or in moments. Do not expect “results” or to “clear the mind”. If your mind wanders, keep returning to the present moment (your breath, your senses). Be gentle with how you talk to yourself. The aim is just to keep returning to what is happening right now.

Stay connected with others. Reach out to whatever social channel offers you the best support. Share your worries with others.
Exercising at home

Now that gyms, pilates, team sports, swimming pools, leisure centers etc. have closed – it’s time to get creative exercising at home.

Working with equipment
- Jogging on a mini trampoline
- Treadmill walking/jogging/interval training: rent a treadmill
- Exercise bike – read, listen to music, watch TV
- Turn your road bike into an indoor bike
- Skipping – get a rope the right length for your height – Bunnings
- Hand weights, bar bells or cans of tinned food for handy weights

No equipment? No worries!
- Walking outside in the fresh air & sunshine
- Dog walking to keep your furry friend happy and healthy too
- Strengthening exercises: squats, mini-squats, heel raises
- Step training – find a step – turn on music and alternate 20 steps left and right legs leading – build up number / time / fitness
- Stair climbing – house with multiple levels / park / garden with steps – increase the number as you get fitter and stronger
- Sit to stand exercise – sit in a standard height chair – stand up & sit down multiple times: great for strong toned leg & butt muscles

Try these online..
- An online service for people with CF www.beamfeelgood.com including Yoga classes – U Tube also offers array of yoga classes
- Virtual online cycling with others: zwift.com – 6 worlds with 80+ routes – you can ride in the scenic Alps with international riders
- Pilates online, anytime: pilatesanytime.com
- Ballet at home: U Tube - use the back of a chair for a barre
- Dance classes: U Tube has many options – turn on your music

Fun with the kids

Exercise in the park with your children – they cycle while you walk / interval run – ball games. Teddy bear hunting to clock up daily steps Make a photographic collection of encouraging messages chalked on pavements - post your own and share with friends & family

Individualised exercise program

‘Exercise is the elixir of life’ – for a unique program in your personal environment please email Brenda Button at: b.button@alfred.org.au
Contacting us

What’s changed?
The CF nursing roles will be changing as the situation evolves and this will include our access to different phone numbers. We would like to request that all of our patients please avoid SMS/texting the outpatient nurses mobile. The CF nurse coordinators will be sharing multiple phones to remain accessible to you, so our usual phone number may often be diverted.

Monday – Friday: 830am – 5pm
As always, if you are unwell or have any concerns regarding your Cystic Fibrosis or overall health, including questions about COVID-19 testing, please phone the Cystic Fibrosis nurse coordinators, Felicity, Elyssa, Olivia and Carmel on 0418 596 938.

If you are in need of an appointment, scripts or a medical letter, please email us at Cysticfibrosis@alfred.org.au. For any and all other general enquiries or requests, please email us and we will get back to you as soon as possible. This email address is manned during business hours only.

Saturday’s & Sundays: Between 10am and 2pm
We will now have a CF nursing coordinator ‘on call’ over the weekends to talk to you if you have become unwell. The on call CF nurse is available to you if you are experiencing viral symptoms; including fevers, increased coughing, breathlessness, or if you have been exposed to someone who has or may have coronavirus. For all other non-urgent matters, please call or email us during business hours.

Out of hours
If you are unwell with a fever, cough or breathlessness, contact The Alfred on 03 9076 2000 and ask to speak to the respiratory doctor on call, who will provide advice depending on the severity of your illness.

Our psychosocial team
As always, our whole team is here to support you with your CF care, your emotional health and other concerns (e.g., financial stress). Most services are now offered remotely (phone or tele-video chat). Please send us an email if you would like to speak with our psychologist, Anthony Talbot, or our social worker, Nick Alaimo. During business hours, Nick can also be contacted via the social work department on 9076 3026.

Medication reminder
We encourage you to keep track of your medication supplies and repeat prescriptions. Please inform us 2 weeks before your medication supply is due to run out. To help us streamline you request, please check all of your medications and provide us with a list in a single email.
Our plan

Admissions
The process for planning an admission remains the same as usual – if you become unwell and you need advice, please call the CF Nurses (Felicity, Olivia, Elyssa and Carmel) on 0418 596 938. At this stage, all planned admissions (eg. Scopes, Iron infusions etc) are going ahead as planned. We will notify you if this changes.

Outpatient clinics
Appointments will now be offered via telemedicine, to reduce the need for you to come into the hospital. Face to face appointments in our clinic rooms will be arranged on an as needed basis. You will still see your usual CF team in your telemedicine review, i.e.; the doctor, physio, dietician, and psychologist and/or social worker. We may ask you to do any required blood tests at your local pathology center. For appointments, please email cysticfibrosis@alfred.org.au

Medications & scripts (including Alfred-only medications)
We suggest that you check your scripts and please discuss these and your ongoing supply needs (medications, supplements, physio equipment etc.) during your telemedicine appointment.

We are working together with the hospital pharmacy to arrange for you to have an increased supply of Alfred Only medications. We will keep you updated as this plan is finalized. Where possible, please visit your local pharmacy to obtain medications.

Work/ Travel / Study
We encourage you to think of alternative arrangements that help you to avoid exposure to large crowds. Practice social distancing and where possible, consider working or studying from home.
We can assist with generic letters around supporting your requests regarding leave, but please bear with us while we work out way through this busy time.

Who should I contact if I have symptoms?
If you are unwell with fever, cough or breathlessness AND have come into contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, please do not attend your outpatient appointment. During business hours, please contact us to discuss your symptoms and treatment plan. After hours, contact The Alfred on 03 9076 2000, who will provide advice depending on the severity of your illness.
Frequently Asked Questions
(Updated March 2020)

What precautions should I take for my personal protection?
Personal hygiene measures are the most important way to reduce the risk of infection. Good handwashing technique using soap and water is essential. Avoid touching your face and practice sneezing into your elbow. The use of masks in the community is not required as they provide minimal benefit over personal hygiene measures. Masks will be provided if clinically necessary, in line with the hospitals Infection Prevention Guidelines.

Should I have the flu vaccinations?
The Cystic Fibrosis Service recommends flu vaccination for everyone when it becomes available in April to protect you in the coming winter flu season, however, this vaccination will not protect you against COVID-19.

Should I have a contingency plan?
Have a contingency plan in case of widespread disruptions or illness, where possible, ensure you have adequate supply of your usual medications. Please discuss this with your usual pharmacist as they will have up to date information in regards to your medications.

Who should I contact if I have symptoms?
If you are unwell with fever, cough or breathlessness AND have come into contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, please do not attend your outpatient appointment. Please contact us to discuss your symptoms and treatment plan. After hours, contact The Alfred on 03 9076 2000, who will provide advice depending on the severity of your illness.

Should I come to my outpatient clinic appointment?
We are currently reviewing the schedule for routine/non urgent appointments to minimise visits to our campuses. We may reschedule your appointment to a later date, or use telehealth (i.e. phone or video link consultation) to provide care. Our team will contact you regarding any changes. Please contact us before your appointment if you are subject to quarantine restrictions due to recent international travel or exposure to a confirmed case of coronavirus.

Should I travel overseas?
We recommend avoiding all “non-essential” travel. Information will constantly change, so keep updated via the Smart Traveller website. We suggest if you are planning to travel you contact your insurance provider.

What do I do if I need a medical letter for work/travel etc.?
We will be able to assist with a generic letter, but please allow up to 1 week for your letter to be sent to you. If you require an individualised letter or document/s, we recommend that you book an appointment with your GP to discuss your request.