

Keeping Routine

There has been a lot of sudden changes recently, and for a lot of people our lives have completely changed. Many of the activities or routines we once had are no longer doable.

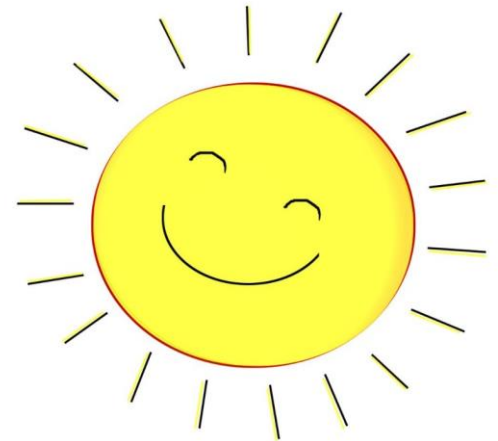
The term groundhog day is something I hear very often right now. It's easy to feel like our days are aimless because of the new circumstances. If you're struggling with this, it's okay, you are not alone.

Trying to get into a simple daily routine that you can follow each day will really help keep yourself occupied and make the days less monotonous. Routine and structure can help at a time where there's lots of uncertainty, and doing the same activities each day can help create a comfortable, familiar space if you feel anxious. But remember, it's okay to not do everything on your to do list every day. Listen to your body, check in with yourself and be extra gentle with yourself during this time.

Here is some advice and tips for creating a new routine and keeping motivated to stick to it:

Morning:

- Try to keep a regular time to wake up each morning. This helps you to create a healthy sleeping pattern and reduces fatigue.
- Make sure you get out of bed after your alarm. Don't stay in bed scrolling on your phone or going over thoughts in your head.
- Go and make yourself a cup of tea/coffee and think of your plan for the day.
- Get washed/dressed. Don't stay in your pyjamas all day. Simply getting out of your pyjamas and getting dressed will automatically make you feel more productive.
- Make yourself a good breakfast. Eat it at the kitchen table or outside in the garden if the weather is nice. Avoid any distractions from your phone or other sources and enjoy each bite.



- At this point you should feel ready to start your work/ activities for the current day – everybody will have different tasks to do during this time so I recommend fully throwing yourself into whatever it is that you are doing.

Tips to remember:

Allow yourself to have a lie-in once or twice a week if you feel like you need it. Scheduling one day a week for a few extra hours in bed can give you something to look forward to as well. If early mornings are difficult for you this will help you get used to setting a regular early wake up time instead of losing the morning by sleeping late every day.

A pyjama day every once in a while never hurt anyone (especially if it's raining). Don't feel guilty for having a jammie day! Just make sure it isn't all the time.



Also do not be ashamed for taking a nap in the afternoon if you feel tired! The added stress and anxiety at the moment can make you feel a bit more tired than usual. Listen to your body and rest when you need to (you aren't lazy!).

Morning/Afternoon:

- Fill your day with things that you enjoy. Make an effort to continue any hobbies you can continue at home: cooking, baking, gardening, painting etc
- Complete any house jobs: washing, dishes, hoovering, mopping or brushing up outside.
- Keep your mind active by doing puzzles, reading a book, watching TV or writing.
- You could use the time to learn a new skill. There are many free online courses and tutorials available on many different topics
- If you have children at home take this time to complete homework or lessons. Make sure you take regular breaks and plenty of snacks!
- Make yourself a nice lunch. Sit down and enjoy it without any distractions.

- Write a letter to a friend or family member. Hand written letters in the post are a lovely surprise.
- Get some form of exercise. There are many online videos available for quick 10 minute home workouts. But simply going for a walk is great to get some fresh air and get your body moving. Or practice some Yoga.
- Stick to regular group times on the Facebook group (the same way you would if you were in the centre or coming into the service). Keeping to the programme schedule is good for creating routine and giving you something to look forward to in the day.

Tips to remember:

If the weather is good (as it has been recently, very strange for NI) try to spend as much time outside as possible. Whether it is reading a book, writing emails/doing homework or eating lunch, soaking up the sunshine and getting fresh air will help you feel more positive.

Exercise is important but I understand it is difficult to get motivated. Just going for a walk will help to boost your mood and stop you getting cabin fever inside the house. You could pick a podcast and listen to it through your earphones or practice some mindful walking.

Read new things or do those little tasks that you have been putting off for a long time. Now is a brilliant time to learn new information or start a project you didn't have the time for before. If you look at lockdown as an opportunity for learning instead of something negative, your mind-set can change and you can embrace the possibilities it brings.

Another tip is to play music somewhere in the house or garden while you are doing your activities, especially dishes or other house chores. I recommend a feel good playlist or radio station with songs that are upbeat and make you happy. (*Currently playing: Walking on Sunshine by Katrina and the Waves). Having music on in the background can really lift your mood and stop you ruminating thoughts.



Evening:

- Evening time should be kept for relaxing activities and winding down.
- Make a nice dinner. Again don't allow for any distractions.
- Take time to relax. Use relaxation techniques such as mindfulness or guided meditation.
- Take a shower or warm bath. I recommend this 1-2 hours before bedtime to relax you and help you to get a better night's sleep.
- Watch some TV or a read a book.
- Connect with family and friends over the phone, text or via video call. Staying connected during this time is vital. Make sure you set aside some time each day to stay in contact with those closest to you.
- Set aside some time before bed to write down a short plan for the next day. For example you could write 3 things you wish to achieve tomorrow. This allows you to make a plan and stops the next day feeling so daunting or long with no direction. It can also feel good the next day to tick these things off the list as you do them.
- Use a gratitude journal to reflect on your day and relax your mind before bed
- Allow at least an hour before bed to be a screen free zone. Do not use your phone for social media or watch the TV right before you plan on sleeping, this keeps your mind active and you can find it harder to switch off (Using a sleep app can be the exception to this rule).

Tips to remember:

Staying connected with others is so important at the minute. Check in with the people you care about, and answer when they are checking in with you. Keep some fun in your interactions by planning a family or friends quiz via Zoom. Or even just have a virtual coffee with your friend. Wave at your neighbours and continue to smile at anyone you see while out on your walks (while maintaining your social distance). Little gestures of kindness mean so much at the moment.



If you need any help make sure you reach out to someone, whether you need help with getting some shopping or are just feeling a bit lonely make sure you stay connected with others. You are not in this alone.

A few other things to note

Limit your exposure to the news. There is a fine line between staying informed and being overwhelmed with information at the moment. Watch the news once a day, preferably the evening news. Don't stay glued to the news throughout the day, avoid the topics on social media and turn off your news bulletins on your phone. Make sure you are getting your information from trusted sources such as WHO (avoid any hearsay). Set yourself a specific time during the day to find out any information then turn it off.

Don't overwhelm yourself thinking that you need to come out of this with a whole new skillset. You aren't expected to be able to run a marathon, be the next Gordon Ramsey or have written a series of novels. Continue doing the things that you enjoy and that keep you mentally well. Take each day as it comes. Not every day will be easy but if you try to stick to a routine it definitely helps the week seem more manageable and even enjoyable!