



# The **New** Normal

Navigating everyday life  
during COVID-19

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# (Not so) Normal life is resuming

COVID-19 has caused widespread disruption to daily life for people across the world. While the virus is under control in some regions, the pandemic is not yet over. Even in places where life is starting to return to normal, there is still the possibility that infections could increase, and restrictions could be reintroduced.

Everyone is now having to incorporate new practices into their everyday life:

- Strict personal hygiene
- Physical distancing
- Following guidelines for the use of shared spaces
- Reporting illness and getting checked if any symptoms appear
- Remaining flexible to respond to future changes in directives

Some people have experienced significant losses because of the virus and others are struggling with anxiety in the face of so many unknowns—it can be hard to know how to move forward. This guide provides ideas and prompts for reflection to help you tailor a new normal that's right for you.



# Rethinking

As restrictions ease it's time to reflect on what we learned (or perhaps enjoyed) during these months.

We can make choices and plans for our new normal, managing changes to the way we do things, and how we support our health and wellbeing.

Factors such as health, finances, family needs and personal preferences have a big impact on what choices are available to different people. It will be helpful to explore what options are possible within the limits of our circumstances and preferences. Some people may prefer to remain isolated because of health needs or comfort levels while others will be keen to jump back into all the activities of their pre-COVID-19 life.

There are personal decisions we all need to make:

- Who do we mix with or invite into our home?
- Where are we comfortable to go?
- How do we get there: walk, cycle, drive or take public transport?
- Should we join in with group activities or attend large events?



# Disruption as an opportunity

We've had to make significant personal changes and, although unpleasant, a disruption like COVID-19 can also provide opportunities:

- Thousands of people trialled working or studying by distance and found it gave them great flexibility, easier time management, better productivity, and improved family life
- Many people enjoyed pursuing a quieter life
- A wide range of health care services became available via telehealth
- Fitness studios, music teachers, libraries and performers found new ways to offer services
- People who had previously found it hard to get out due to illness or mobility have had more opportunities to join social and cultural activities which moved to online delivery





# Start, Stop or Continue?

In choosing what your new normal looks like, you can consider what activities you would like to start, stop or continue as restrictions ease.



## What do I want to START?

Is there something new I'd like to do?

What am I keen to restart or return to doing?

## What do I want to STOP?

Are there things I was doing before that I no longer want to continue?

Did I pick up some unhelpful habits during restrictions that I want to stop?

## What do I want to CONTINUE?

What things have I kept doing during restrictions and want to continue doing?

Are there things I began during the restrictions that I want to continue?



Start, Stop or Continue?

We can reflect on daily life by thinking about:



**Roles**



**Routines**



**Self-care**



**Productivity**



**Leisure**



**Our Spaces**



# Roles

Roles describe the things we do and how we relate to people around us. These include things like being a student, worker, club-member, hobbyist, parent, sibling, or friend.





Were any of your roles interrupted because of the pandemic?

- Make a plan about how to return to a valued role and what supports you might need.

Have you found new ways to do your roles?

- You may be able to use online communication and resources to support your roles.

Did you take up any new roles during the restrictions?

- Consider how these new commitments can be balanced with existing roles in your life.

Do you want to take on any new roles starting now?

Would you like to focus more on some roles and less on others?

- Aim for balance: have a few clear roles, some of which may be more significant than others.



# Routines

Routines provide the pattern for our daily lives and generally support us in being able to do the things we need to do when we need to do them. Having a predictable routine can give us a sense of stability.

A balanced routine includes self-care, productivity, and leisure activities.



While it may be tempting to jump back into everything you did before, it is wise to take time to reshape your routine, and gradually transition toward a new normal.

Do you want the pattern of life to return to how it was before, or is it time for a change?

Would you like to be less busy than you were previously?

Have you done more or less of something recently, such as spending more time with family or less time in the community?

How did you find that experience?

Is this an opportunity to simplify life by reducing your commitments?

Will life be more or less spontaneous?



Aim for a balance of self-care, productivity and leisure occupations in your routine.

Be deliberate about planning the new routine for yourself and your household.

It might help to write out a timetable.

Planning ahead will be important. You may be required to book at your favourite café, pre-pay for your timeslot in the swim lane, or have a precise arrival time for services that may have previously used a drop-in model.

Be prepared for spontaneity. We can't know what restrictions or freedoms will be in place in coming months so it might be hard to plan things like going on a trip or booking a show or conference. Being spontaneous when opportunities arise might expand your options.



# Self-Care

Looking after yourself and your space includes being conscious about meeting physical and mental health needs to support your wellbeing.



## **Personal Care**

Continuing with excellent personal hygiene is essential in the new normal.

- If the increased handwashing and sanitising is irritating your skin it might be helpful to carry moisturiser and apply it regularly.

Are you someone who previously soldiered on unless you were “really sick”?

Times have changed and now a little sniffle requires staying home. Not only will this help to protect others, it may allow your body to rest and recover more quickly.

- Give yourself permission to rest and factor in rest times through the week.



## **Mental Health Support**

Coping with the uncertainties and restrictions of the past months may have been distressing and adapting to the new normal may also be challenging.

- Be kind to yourself, focusing on the future and not on past disappointments.
- Make space to grieve, whether that is the loss of a loved one, employment, hopes or plans.
- Reach out to your usual care providers, telephone or online support services for mental or emotional support.
- Or seek out support if you have not previously used it.



## **Health Support**

You may now be able to get back to doing things that were previously part of your self-care like exercise classes, attending regular health care appointments and having check-ups.

- Do not put off having recommended tests or regular screenings—your overall health needs must not be overlooked.
- Explore whether telehealth options could increase the ease of attending appointments.





## **Shopping & Food**

Have you learned new ways of shopping such as online ordering, store pick up or home delivery?

Do you want to continue shopping in new ways or return to shopping in-person?

- Factor into your routine the extra time it may take to shop, given queuing and restrictions on the number of people in stores.

Have your cooking skills developed with more time at home?

How can you continue to use and expand these new skills?

- Nourish yourself by making healthy food choices and eating regularly.



## **Exercise**

Exercise is very important for maintaining physical and mental health.

Have you tried out a new form of exercise recently?

Did you stop or decrease your preferred exercise during restrictions?

- Make a plan for safely returning to previous forms of exercise.
- Consider including online exercise classes in your new routine.
- Use active transport like walking, cycling or running to get places.
- Be deliberate about including exercise in your day, including incidental exercise while doing other tasks.

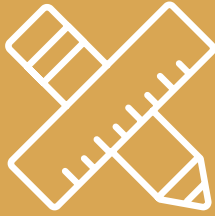


## **Sleep**

Sleep is really important for your health. Many people have reported more broken sleep during recent months.

Have your sleep patterns changed during restrictions?

- Support your health by maintaining regular sleep and wake times.
- If you're planning a return to the workplace it may help to adjust your sleep routine now so you have time to adapt.



# Productivity

This includes everything you do for your paid or voluntary work, learning or studying, caring and anything that contributes to your family and community.



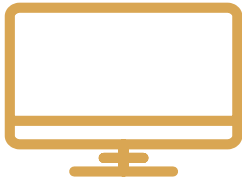
## Did your productive activities stop, decrease or change due to restrictions?



- Was that a challenge or a relief?
- Are there opportunities to do old things in new ways?
- Or opportunities to move toward something new?
- Does this impact on your finances or other aspects of your life



- It might be helpful to make plans in stages if it's not possible to immediately get back to your former daily activities. For example, obtaining work that provides an income while continuing to explore options for work that links better with your skills and preferences.
- Consider other ways of being productive like doing a course, undertaking household projects or finding a volunteer role.



Have you been working or studying from home, or having online meetings?

- Was it beneficial to spend less time commuting?
- How did you find being distant from peers or colleagues?
- How did you maintain the boundary between home and work?
- Might it take some time for your former ways of working and studying to resume?

How can you move towards your preferred ways of working?

- Consider whether a blended model might support your productive occupations, such as spending some days at work and some days working from home. This might provide the “best of both worlds” and can help to support social connection with colleagues.



# Leisure

Leisure includes those things that can recharge us and bring pleasure.



Some leisure activities are becoming available again like community sports, while others may not look the same for a long time, like going to concerts.

### How do new processes affect your leisure activities?

- Keep up with current government and organisational guidelines and consider whether what is offered can work for you.

Many organisations have offered online delivery of social, cultural and leisure activities, such as book clubs, livestreamed concerts, and card games with friends.

### Did you try any online leisure pursuits?

- Explore whether these allow for new opportunities, like being able to see a show without arranging babysitting.

### Did your household enjoy more home-based leisure activities like board games and private concerts?

- Consider how to include these new approaches to leisure within your new normal.





# Our Spaces

Our lives occur in the context of an environment, which includes spaces and objects.



## **Shared Spaces**

It may be a relief to get out of the home and move around in other spaces, although navigating new expectations around the use of shared spaces and appropriate distancing from others might feel tricky or anxiety-provoking.

How do you feel about sharing space with others?

Does that differ if they are friends or strangers?

Will you feel you more comfortable in smaller, rather than larger groups?

- It may help to plan ahead by finding out the guidelines of the places you are going, so you know what to expect and how to prepare for being in those spaces.
- Plan to visit shops or services at quieter times of the day.
- Pack your own food, cutlery and cup, and carry hand sanitiser with you.
- Aim for some variety in the spaces you access to keep things interesting and support your mood.



## Your Private Space

Did you alter your space to meet household needs during restrictions?

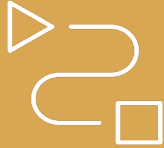
- Consider how the space can be reset to meet new and ongoing needs.

Are you going to continue working or studying from home?

- Set up an ergonomic workstation to support safe and effective working, such as incorporating objects like a desk chair or monitor.

What makes you feel comfortable and engaged?

- Think about how to nourish your senses by doing things like putting on music to lift your mood, opening a window for fresh air or using herbal tea or essential oils.



# Reshaping Your New Normal

In times to come we'll look back on the global disruption of COVID-19. Take the opportunity now to reflect on what has happened and what is unfolding. Be deliberate about shaping your new normal so that you may also be able to look back and find things that changed for the better.



# So what do Occupational Therapists do?

Occupational therapists (OTs) are health professionals who support health and wellbeing for people at all life stages. They have a broad understanding of the word 'occupation' – using it to describe everything that people need to do (like looking after themselves), want to do (like going to the movies) or are expected to do (like going to work or handing in assignments).

Illness, injury or developmental challenges can impact peoples' abilities to participate in occupation, so OTs work with people to explore whether making a change to the person, the occupation or the environment might enable occupational participation. Making a change to the person might involve learning new skills or ways of doing things. Making a change to the occupation might be involve doing the same occupation in a different way, or finding a substitute occupation, and changing the environment might involve bringing in new objects or rearranging objects within the space.

This is general information intended to support you in managing the present pandemic-related occupational disruption. Please contact a health professional for specific advice.

Consider any suggestions in line with the current government and health department recommendations and restrictions as these are updated regularly. It may be that something suggested becomes no longer possible.

This guide has been compiled by Lorrae Mynard. Lorrae is a Melbourne-based occupational therapist and PhD candidate with Monash University. She has worked in a variety of adult mental health settings in Australia, Canada and the UK. Her earlier guide 'Normal life has been disrupted: Managing the disruption caused by COVID-19' has been translated into more than a dozen languages and can be downloaded here - <https://bit.ly/2Ulkxsz>

Both guides may be shared freely.



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