

Managing lockdown fatigue

No one thought when the pandemic hit Australia in January, that months later, many of us would still be dealing with its fallout. The restrictions for those living and working in areas where the number of COVID cases are higher have caused psychological, physical, and emotional effects, including physical and mental exhaustion. However, this fatigue can also be experienced by people in states or regions where there are no or very few positive cases of COVID, and where the long-term restrictions, such as border closures, have had a significant impact on their personal and work-related freedoms. This information sheet outlines what lockdown fatigue is, some of its causes, signs and symptoms, ideas to help you to manage it, and where to seek help if needed.

What is lockdown fatigue?

Lockdown fatigue has been described worldwide as a state of exhaustion caused by the long-term effects of COVID-19 and the changes it has caused to every aspect of your life. It is a state experienced when people have had to come to terms with a virus that has affected every aspect of their life, including their freedom, and which has continued for months, sometimes with no end in sight until a vaccine or treatment is discovered.

Allow yourself to grieve the 'old normal'

Many people are beginning to miss the pleasures of their old way of life and are grieving the loss of safety and predictability that has resulted from COVID-19.

Grief is a natural reaction to loss or change of any kind and it is important to give yourself time to adjust to new routines and activities.

Dealing with feelings of sadness and loss can make us feel like we are 'on an emotional roller coaster' which can cause our behaviour to be unpredictable. This can lead to tensions and conflicts with the people we live with and they may not know how to best support us. Being able to communicate honestly about how you are feeling and how you can support each other may reduce or avoid potential conflict.

Remember, many people will be sharing a similar experience to you so don't be afraid to share your feelings and be open to accepting help and support from others if needed.

What are the causes?

Most people have never experienced the unknowns related to, and the restrictions imposed by, COVID-19. The unfamiliarity of this situation can be seen through the use of so many terms that we have heard on a daily basis since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Australia:

- social and physical distancing
- unprecedented
- feeling unwell – get tested
- practise good hygiene
- restrictions
- quarantining
- self-isolation
- curfew
- daily reported cases
- border closures
- mandatory mask wearing

All these terms are now a part of everyday language. And recently, 'lockdown fatigue' has been added to this growing list.

Understanding lockdown fatigue

Some of the reasons for the fatigue you may be feeling include:

- not being able to do what you want to
- being cooped up
- having to home school your children while trying to work from home
- sick of being cautious
- being cut-off from normal social interaction
- feeling uncertain and anxious about your employment or financial situation
- not seeing an end to the changes in your world as a result of COVID-19
- worrying about what the world will look like after COVID-19
- hearing about some people 'not doing the right thing'
- the inconsistent messages given by leaders and politicians
- being bombarded by COVID-19 information.

What does lockdown fatigue feel like?

Some of the symptoms of lockdown fatigue that you may be experiencing include:

- short temper with outbursts of frustration, anger and irritability
- sadness
- depression
- anxiety and fear
- physical exhaustion and burnout
- difficulty focusing, prioritising, problem-solving and making decisions
- lack of motivation and reduced interest in previously enjoyed activities

- difficulty in maintaining a routine
- behavioural changes such as non-compliance with public health strategies, over- or under-eating and increased reliance on alcohol, cigarettes or drugs
- sleep disturbance
- negative thoughts like 'I'm over this', 'I can't see an end to it all', 'I'm so tired, I've just got no energy or motivation', 'It's getting harder and harder to get out of bed each morning', and 'I can't stand this anymore'
- exhaustion throughout the day.



How to deal with lockdown fatigue

Some ideas for managing during this difficult time:

- Recognise and try to accept that although you want to return to some sort of normality, this is only possible when it is safe.
- Acknowledge your feelings and reactions and try not to be critical or judge yourself. Some ideas that might help to recognise and understand your reactions include keeping a journal, doing meditation or other relaxation, or talking through your feelings with someone you trust.
- Be kind to yourself (and others). Accept that you may be more tired, not as productive or motivated as usual, and that you may have a shorter fuse and be more irritable.
- Try to create and stick to a routine. It's common to feel tired and unmotivated when you're not in your usual schedule, so it's important to create a routine for your sleep, meals, work, rest and exercise. If you are working from home, take time-out and schedule regular breaks to get fresh air and relax.
- Connect with family, friends, and colleagues. Humans are social beings, so one of the hardest impacts of the COVID-19 for you may have been the restrictions on your social contact with people. If this is the case, make the most of technology, whether it be the phone or computer, to speak and/or see the important people in your life on a regular basis.
- Make the most of any opportunities to communicate, such

as chatting over the back fence or balcony with a neighbour, passing them biscuits you baked or lemons from your tree; speaking to a passer-by as you weed your front garden, or while out walking in your local area; or asking the delivery person how they are as they deliver a parcel.

- Spend time relaxing. Do the things you enjoy, whether it be listening to music, reading, watching movies, gardening, working on your family history, playing games, or doing puzzles, craftwork or painting.
- Try to balance your negative thoughts with positive ones, to focus on the present and try not to worry about what you cannot control. Remember that Australia is doing really well in managing the risks of COVID-19 and flattening the curve, and that continuing with restrictions will place us in an even better position.
- Seek additional help when needed.
- Make sure you look after yourself and get some of the following basics right:
 - eat sensibly
 - get regular exercise and keep active
 - sleep well – try and keep to a routine and prioritise sleep, as the body needs good sleep to restore itself
 - drink plenty of water
 - get fresh air and sun if possible.

Accessing help

Seek additional support if you feel that you are struggling with lockdown fatigue, or with coping with any aspect of COVID-19. A psychologist may be able to help. Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns. If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details.

There are number of ways to access a psychologist.

You can:

- use the Australia-wide [Find a Psychologist™](#) service. Go to findapsychologist.org.au or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

The APS has a number of resources available to assist Australians in managing their mental health during the coronavirus outbreak.

Visit psychology.org.au for more.

More information

Australian Government Department of Health

The Department of Health has developed a collection of resources for the general public, health professionals and industry about coronavirus (COVID-19), including translated resources. <https://bit.ly/380OwHe>

National Coronavirus Helpline

Call this line if you are seeking information on coronavirus (COVID-19) or help with the COVIDSafe app. The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Phone: 1800 020 080 <https://bit.ly/2BXqVts>

Safework Australia

Safe Work Australia's website provides information on industry information on COVID-19 including business restrictions. <https://bit.ly/32djBUN>




Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides reliable information about the coronavirus such as its symptoms, steps you can take to protect yourself, and what to do if you are affected. <https://bit.ly/39MEml8>

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization provides information and guidance regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease. <https://bit.ly/3cQUwCw>

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