

Protecting Mental Health: Tips for Aged Care Workers

The team at the National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) (including psychologists and social workers with expertise in mental health), with help from our aged care partners, has developed a series of tip sheets. This one is for aged care workers, and describes what you can do if you feel stressed or anxious during COVID-19, and how to look after your mental health.

Who is this tip sheet for?

This tip sheet is for people working in aged care, such as nurses, personal care attendants, kitchen staff, laundry staff, maintenance and administration staff.

Why you may be feeling stressed or anxious

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you may have dealt with things you do not usually have to deal with.

- You may have had a COVID-19 infection in your workplace or just had to be ready for one
- You may have worked extra shifts or longer hours due to colleagues being unwell or away
- You may have had to deal with stressed and anxious residents who are locked down with no visitors
- You may have felt confused about what is going on and what this means for your job
- You may have had to juggle multiple jobs
- You may be coping with personal life stress like restrictions and the impacts on you and your family

Given all these challenges, it is understandable if you are feeling anxious or stressed. This might be affecting your sleep, mood, relationships with others, and your physical and mental wellbeing.

Tips for Reducing Anxiety and Stress

It's OK to Feel Not OK

It is normal to feel frustrated, stressed and anxious during these challenging times. Change and uncertainty are stressful. You may feel tired and tapped out at the moment. Accept these feelings – it is normal to feel this way

Look After Yourself

Try to stay active. If possible, regularly plan time for a walk or another activity you enjoy. Eat well and make sure you get enough sleep. Check out NARI's resources on keeping active and eating well

during the outbreak (<https://www.nari.net.au/covid-19-resources>). You may find mindfulness or meditation helpful. There are several apps for this, including [The Mindfulness App](#) or [Headspace](#).

Stay in Touch

Keep in touch with family and friends by phone, mail, or the internet. If you can, talk to people who you can talk to and who will listen without judging or criticising. You may like to visit BeConnected (<https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/>) for tips on how to connect through video.

Avoid Unhealthy Coping Strategies

It can be tempting to drink more alcohol or eat unhealthy food when we are feeling stressed. Try to avoid this.

Take Time to Switch Off

It is good to keep informed but it is also good to have a break from news and screens, especially before bedtime.

Enjoy Your Time Off

Spend time doing things you enjoy and that give you a sense of satisfaction. You work hard and deserve a break.

Get Your Facts from a Reliable Source

The [Government's Coronavirus health alert](#) is the best source of up-to-date information on coronavirus.

Let Go of What You Can't Control

Put your time and energy into the things you can control. Sometimes, all you can control is your effort and your attitude.

Be kind to yourself and to others and seek help if you need to.

Why We Developed this Tip Sheet

We at NARI wanted to address the importance of the wellbeing and mental health of aged care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. International research tells us that the pandemic has a significant mental health impact on those working at the front line in health and aged care.

This tip sheet does not replace professional psychological or psychiatric help. Services that can provide professional assistance are listed below.

Resources

We strongly recommend that you also refer to the official sources listed below for up-to-date, reliable information.

Organisation	Audience	Description	More Information
Australian Psychological Society (APS) <i>Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information for Australians</i>	General Public Carers Healthcare Professionals	The APS has developed a series of information sheets that cover a wide variety of topics related to coping with COVID-19, including: - Managing lockdown fatigue - Maintaining your mental health during isolation - COVID-19 and frontline workers - Information for older adults - Tips for residential aged care communities	www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/COVID-19-Australians
Beyond Blue	General Public Carers Healthcare Professionals	An Australian mental health and wellbeing organisation that offers online information, as well as a support service including telephone, online chat, and email support for those experiencing depression or anxiety, or going through a difficult time.	www.beyondblue.org.au 1300 22 4636 (24 hours)
Department of Health <i>COVID-19 Health Alert</i>	General Public Carers Healthcare Professionals	Up-to-date information about how the Australian Government is monitoring and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how you can help stop the spread of the virus in Australia and what to do if you have symptoms. This website also reports the latest case numbers, official medical advice and information on treatment.	https://bit.ly/3bXFSb6
Lifeline	General Public Carers Healthcare Professionals	A national charity providing all Australians experiencing emotional distress with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services. Support services include phone, text, and online chat support.	https://www.lifeline.org.au/ 13 11 14 (24 hours)
Mental Health Australia	General Public Carers Healthcare Professionals	A directory of helplines, websites and government mental health information services, providing information about mental health and how to seek help.	https://mhaustralia.org/need-help
Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria	Healthcare Professionals	An independent support service for nurses, midwives and students of nursing and midwifery experiencing health issues related to their mental health or substance use concerns. Provides screening, assessment, referrals, individual support sessions and groups for those seeking help to manage these health concerns.	www.nmhp.org.au/ (03) 9415 7551

Swinburne
National
Telehealth
Counselling and
Support Service

General Public
Carers
Healthcare
Professionals

A free service has been developed to support residents, families and staff through the COVID-19 period. Trained counsellors (postgraduate health care students and provisionally registered psychologists) are available to stay in touch by phone or video calls to provide emotional support.

(03) 9214 8653
wellbeingclinic_agedcare@swin.edu.au