



Ministry  
of Defence

# Defence People Health and Wellbeing Guide: COVID-19



# Introduction

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a significant challenge to us as individuals and as an organisation and it will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on our lives. You may be anxious about the safety of your loved ones and your own safety, but you may also have concerns about self-isolation, working from home or alternatively working away from your home and your family to support the UK Government through Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA) Activities.

There has been an overwhelming amount of health and wellbeing guidance from the Government, NHS England the Devolved Administrations, Public Health England, charities and the private sector. The purpose of this guide is to bring as much of that advice together as possible, as well as signpost trusted governmental and Defence affiliated partners and charities.

# Contents

## Table of Contents

Contents	3
General Health and Wellbeing	4
Support	4
Support Online	4
How to support your Mental Health	5
Stay Connected	5
Get good sleep	5
Think positively	5
Challenge yourself	5
Take some 'me time'	5
Help other people who need it	6
Mental Health and Wellbeing Tools	7
Civil Servants	7
Military Personnel	7
Other tools	7
Medical Support	8
Healthy Living	9
Diet and Exercise	9
Smoking	10
Alcohol	11
Gambling	11
Working from Home	12
Financial Wellbeing	13
Families	14
Support Networks	16

# General Health and Wellbeing

It is important for all Defence personnel to consider the impact Coronavirus (COVID-19) may have on their own health and wellbeing, that of their colleagues and their families.

It may be that your work changes during this time either in volume or task. You may have recently started a new role, and this has disrupted your induction and learning. You may be taking on extra responsibilities if members of your team have been taken to support COVID-19 activities, or it may be that you may feel a sense of helplessness or frustration about not being able to support COVID-19 efforts more directly.

## Support

If you are in the military and feel you need support, you should always approach your Chain of Command in the first instance, they will be able to direct you to specialist staff or services.

If you are a civilian, you should contact your line manager, but all civilian employees also have 24 hour access to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) which provides advice, emotional support and counselling.

Each unit/site will have put different COVID-19 measures in place so always follow local direction in the first instance, but you can also find online support on defnet or Defence Connect, accessed via the Defence Gateway.

## Support Online

[Coronavirus FAQs – defnet](#) These offer real time and up to date advice for Defence personnel on COVID-19.

The [defnet Health and Wellbeing Portal](#) provides health and wellbeing advice, tools and resources, including current policies and initiatives, as well as links to other single Service, Civilian HR sites and Defence affiliated charities. A consolidated list of these services can be found in Section 7.

Individuals who do not have access to MODNET or other MOD communications should access the NHS COVID-19 and Public Health England websites for up-to-date information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>



# How to support your Mental Health

Looking after our mental health and wellbeing can help us deal with and manage difficult times. You can support your mental health by first being aware of the things that can cause you poor wellbeing. You can then take steps to prevent or mitigate the impact of those stressors, but also employ more proactive techniques to enhance your mental fitness and build resilience. It's important to remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and to ask for support if you need it.

## Stay Connected

If you're working from home or self-isolating you can keep connected to your team with regular contact through phone calls, instant messaging and video calls (e.g. Skype, Zoom).

Outside of work make sure you stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media.

## Get good sleep

Try to maintain a regular sleep schedule and ensure your bedroom creates optimal sleeping conditions. Your room should be the right temperature between 15 to 22 degrees Celsius, and free from noise and light. Don't nap during the day and limit exposure to bright light and screen usage in the hour before you intend to sleep.

The [NHS](#) and [Mental Health Foundation](#) have dedicated advice pages to support good sleep. For those who need more personalised support you can access "[Sleep Station](#)" through The Charity for Civil Servants website.

## Think positively

Stay positive, challenge any unhelpful or negative thoughts and focus on the things that you *can* control. Stay informed but consider limiting your information to fixed times and credible sources such as [gov.uk](#) and [PHE](#) websites.

Consider having a break from social media and 'mute' conversations or key words or unfollow pages or people if you are finding them too overwhelming.

## Challenge yourself

Setting yourself goals and challenges, whether at work or outside, helps build confidence and self-esteem. The [Open University website](#) and [Future Learn](#) each have a large catalogue of free courses to gain new knowledge and skills.

The Defence Learning Environment (DLE) hosts a suite of online learning courses including [Digital Training for non-ModNet users](#) and Civil Servants can also access learning through [Civil Service Learning](#) or, where available, its new [platform](#). This is being rolled out across TLBs during April and May, and all civil servants are encouraged to sign up for an account.

## Take some 'me time'

If you are going to be in your home for an extended period, it is important you plan breaks in your working day and organise activities you're interested in at night. It might be the chance to work through your personal to-do list or take up a new hobby.

**Help other people who need it**

There is evidence to suggest that helping others, through small acts is linked to positive personal wellbeing, activities such as assisting those who are in the vulnerable category or having to self-isolate, or by undertaking community work.

Of course, be mindful around maintaining your personal health whilst doing so.

The [WHO Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak guidance](#) sets out some useful information on how to protect yourself and be supportive of others, including caring for children and older adults. The [FAQs](#) explain volunteering policies for civilians and military colleagues.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Tools

### HeadFIT

[HeadFIT](#) is a set of online resources (text, image and video content) that assist the user in developing a proactive approach to mental fitness. It is made up of a series of tools or activities that can be easily incorporated into anyone's day-to-day routine with the aim of establishing healthy habits that will, in turn, help the user to unlock potential, achieve personal goals and reach optimal well-being. Use the HeadFIT tools to improve your drive, confidence, mood and how you de-stress.

### Civil Servants

[Employee Assistance Programme \(Health Assured\)](#) The EAP service is a confidential civilian employee benefit designed to help you deal with personal and professional problems that could be affecting your home life or work life, health and general wellbeing. It provides a complete support network that offers expert advice and compassionate guidance 24/7, covering a wide range of issues.

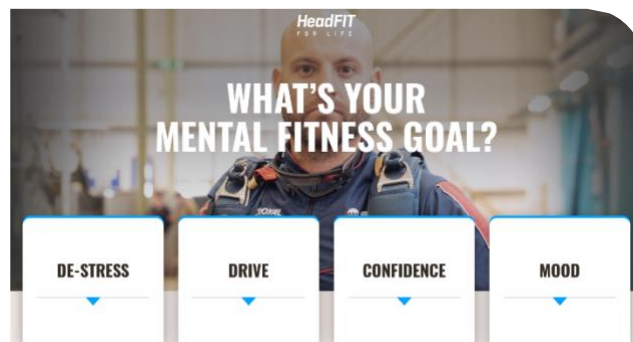
**Tel:** 0800 345 7047.

### Military Personnel

- The Royal Navy's [SharePoint site](#) provides access to mental fitness tools and COVID-19 Mental Wellbeing Advice.
- The [Army's Health and Wellbeing page](#) on Defence Connect has a multitude of tools to support mental resilience as well as COVID-19 resources and guidance.
- [The RAF Booklet - Thriving at Work](#) shares emerging hints, tips and wider guidance to help all personnel (and families) to get through these challenging times.

### Other tools

- [Stress Assessment and Stress Reduction Tool](#) This tool is based on information from the Health and Safety Executive website helps staff and managers to assess the risks of work-related stress within a job role and identify any areas of concern.
- The [5 Step Wellbeing Conversation Tool](#) takes the principles of this tool to help managers have wellbeing focused conversations with their colleagues.
- The NHS website has a calming [breathing exercise](#) to help with stress and anxiety.
- Anxiety UK has developed advice and support online via their website blogs: [health and other forms of anxiety](#) and [COVID-19 and anxiety](#). They give helpful tips on what to do when self-isolating to protect your mental wellbeing and how to deal with mental health issues such as anxiety disorders.
- The MOD has an 8 week [Mindfulness Course](#) available to all staff through the Defence Gateway.



## Medical Support

For military personnel, support is still available at medical centres; appointments/consultations are being conducted by telephone where possible. In addition some Medical Centres are introducing online consultation.

Visit: <https://patients.econsult.health> on your laptop, tablet or mobile device and simply enter the name of your medical centre.

To prevent the spread of Coronavirus, do not visit your medical or rehabilitation

centre; if you have a temperature or cough or have had contact with somebody with these symptoms follow government guidance on self-isolation.

For all Coronavirus concerns please follow Public Health England and NHS guidance available online at: <http://111.nhs.uk/>



# Healthy Living

As a result of Coronavirus all Defence personnel will be trying to adapt to the new ways of working be it from home or away from home, each poses a unique set of challenges.

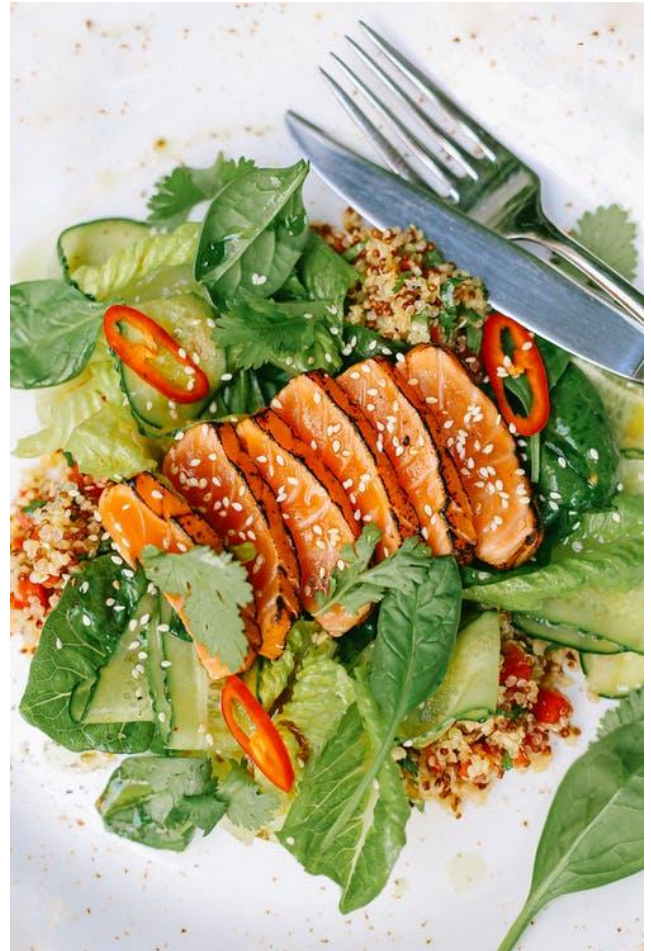
Also be aware that behavioural indicators such as drinking more alcohol or smoking more than is usual or having difficulty sleeping, may all be signs that you are becoming less mentally able to cope, so make sure you seek support.

## Diet and Exercise

Try to [eat healthy, well-balanced meals](#), drink enough water, exercise regularly, and avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs. Ideas for healthy meals, especially for those that may be living in on-site or other temporary accommodation can be found in the [Healthy Soldier Cookbook](#).

If you are well, you can take part in light exercise within your home or garden. Ideas of exercise that you can do at home can be found on the [NHS website](#). You can also access almost 600 free exercise videos on [Fitness Blender](#) that can be filtered by difficulty, length and other criteria.

Keep your windows open to let in fresh air, and get some natural sunlight if you can, or go outside into the garden. If you're not in a vulnerable group and not self-isolating, consider going for a walk - try to walk somewhere quiet and ensure that you remain 2 metres away from others



# Smoking

If you smoke, you are not only putting yourself at greater risk of developing severe disease from the COVID-19 virus, but those around you exposed to second hand smoke, including children, are also put at increased risk.

Smoking tobacco is known to damage the lungs and airways causing a range of severe respiratory problems. The evidence clearly shows COVID-19 virus attacks the respiratory system, which explains why smokers are at greater risk. A small but [highly impactful survey from China](#) finds that smokers with COVID-19 are 14 times more likely to develop severe disease. In addition, the repetitive hand to mouth movement provides an easy route of entry for the virus, putting smokers at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

As the NHS continue to prioritise medical support for COVID-19 some every day support services have had to be reduced or temporary suspended, this includes many of the National No-Smoking Support hotlines.

However, you can still access support online and cessation products should still be available at pharmacies. For more information on COVID-19 and Smoking follow: [Smokefree Action Coalition](#).

## Useful Contacts

Health Information	
<b>NHS Choices</b>	<a href="#">NHS stop smoking advisers help you quit - Live Well - NHS Choices</a>
<b>England</b>	<a href="#">Smoking?   Advice to help you stop smoking.</a> <a href="#">NHS SmokeFree</a>
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<a href="#">Homepage</a>   <a href="#">Want2Stop</a>
<b>Scotland</b>	<a href="http://www.canstopsmoking.com/">http://www.canstopsmoking.com/</a>
<b>Wales</b>	<a href="https://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LiveWell/LifestyleWellbeing/Smoking">https://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LiveWell/LifestyleWellbeing/Smoking</a>
<b>Action on Smoking and Health [ASH]</b> Registered Charity	<a href="#">Welcome   Action on Smoking and Health</a>
<b>Quit.</b> Registered Charity	<a href="#">Supporting smokers to stop smoking.</a>   <a href="#">Help giving up smoking.</a>   <a href="#">QUIT</a>

# Alcohol

All Defence people are encouraged to drink sensibly as part of a healthy lifestyle: even a small reduction in alcohol consumption can significantly benefit your overarching health and wellbeing. The [NHS](#) website provides alcohol advice and support, and [Drinkaware](#) provides users with self-assessment tools as well as further guidance about how to reduce your alcohol consumption whilst at home.

# Gambling

on 27 Mar 20 identified exposure to gambling advertising, including on social media, can have an impact on attitudes towards the prevalence and acceptability of gambling, and in turn the likelihood that a child, young person or vulnerable adult will gamble in the future.

As many Defence people will be experiencing some degree of self-isolation, it is important that we continue to raise awareness and provide support to anyone experiencing gambling-related challenges. If you, or someone you know needs gambling help, advice and support go to: <https://www.beGambleAware.org> (cannot be accessed via MOD IT systems) or contact the National Gambling Helpline on 0800 8020 133.

# Working from Home

You may be used to remote working or this may be new. Either way it is important to take some steps to set your day and working environment.

- **Structure your day** and replicate what your typical working day might be like in the office, e.g. coffee to start, snacks and lunch at similar times
- **Choose a dedicated work area** that is tidy and ensure you have any necessary equipment, e.g. pens, paper, calendar, etc. The NHS advice is that you should adjust your chair so you can use the keyboard with your wrists and forearms straight and level with the floor.

- **Get dressed.** This does not necessarily mean uniform/work clothing but washing and getting dressed will not only improve your state of mind, it will psychologically prepare you to start work. Likewise, changing out of work clothes when you clock off for the day helps your brain to understand that the working day is over.
- **Take regular breaks**
- **Use the phone.** Emails and instant messages are great but you're not getting the normal office chit-chat so think about using the phone instead.



Defnet has detailed guidance about the use of IT and [remote working](#).

If you are receiving services for your mental health, learning disability or autism and are worried about the impact of isolation please

contact your keyworker/care coordinator or provider to review your care plan. If you have additional needs, please contact your key worker or care coordinator to develop a safety or crisis plan.

# Financial Wellbeing

For detailed COVID-19 related advice on pay, allowances and expenses please refer to the [Coronavirus FAQs – defnet](#).

Armed Forces personnel that require financial support should discuss this with their Chain of Command in the first instance, alternatively Unit Welfare Officers will be able to provide advice and signposting to Defence affiliated partners.

Joining Forces CU represents the coming together of three MoD affiliated credit unions to provide bespoke saving schemes and affordable loans to the Armed Forces and its Veterans. It also supports Armed Forces personnel's financial management by making repayments straight from their pay. More information and links to the Credit Unions can be found at [Joining Forces CU](#).

Serve and protect have also issued some Coronavirus '[helps and tips](#)' to help people manage their finance during this difficult period. You can also access a range of more general tools and calculators from the Money Advice Service [here](#). Civilians can access practical financial support from The [Charity for Civil Servants](#)






**SERVE PROTECT**

### Coronavirus: Managing your Financial Resilience

During times of uncertainty, finances can be the last thing on your mind. But, for many of our Serve and Protect family throughout the country, now is a time when their financial resilience becomes vital. Some are facing the possibility of their household income halving, others are suddenly having to arrange childcare, all whilst continuing to serve and protect our nation during this difficult time. **But, what can you do to maintain your financial resilience?**

**Below are some useful hints and tips to help you get through this challenging period.**

[www.serveandprotectcu.co.uk](http://www.serveandprotectcu.co.uk)

- 1) Mortgage Payment Holidays**  
 If you are struggling to keep up with your mortgage during the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be eligible for a rest period of 3 months during which you will not have to pay your mortgage. Note that this is a voluntary break offered by a few banks. If you feel that you could benefit, contact your bank to find out if they offer it and make sure you fully understand the process. The cost of the 3 months will result in a small uplift on your remaining payments, and you will still be charged interest for this period.
- 2) Access your Fixed-term Savings Account**  
 If you need access to funds as a result of COVID-19, you may consider accessing your fixed-rate savings account. Usually, if you want to withdraw from a fixed-rate savings account before your term is up, you will incur penalties for early withdrawal. However, several banks have pledged to waive penalties for those who need to access their funds because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your interest may be affected, so if you can manage without, do so. Instead, look at cutting down your outgoings and creating an emergency budget plan on the free tool on our website: [www.policecu.co.uk/foansbudget-planner/](http://www.policecu.co.uk/foansbudget-planner/).
- 3) Help for Renters and Landlords**  
 If you are renting from a private or social landlord and you are struggling to meet your rent as a result of COVID-19, you should contact your landlord in the first instance to work out a realistic repayment plan. New legislation set to be imposed by the government means that no evictions can take place lawfully within the next 3 months, protecting renters who are struggling financially. Existing protocols in place for social landlords dealing with rent arrears will also be extended to help private landlords manage the deficit.
- 4) Avoid high cost lenders**  
 When times get tough, it can be tempting to turn to high cost lenders or high-interest credit cards to get cash quickly. Whilst this might solve the problem to begin with, it can often leave you in a worse position later on, as a result of high interest, fees, and the adverse impact it can have your credit history. If you are in need of a loan to support you, there are ethical alternatives out there that can help you, like the credit union.
- 5) Speak to someone**  
 Lean on your Serve and Protect family. If you have colleagues that you can ask to help you cope with your financial stress, now is the time to do so. Too often, when we face financial worries, we are too afraid to talk to someone. Instead, we suffer in silence. If you are already feeling the impact and are having difficulty paying your debts, reach out to your creditors as soon as you can. Some creditors will offer small periods of non-payment, to allow you some time to get things in order. Remember, it is okay to ask for help!

**Proud to support those who Serve and Protect.**

Here for you, when you need us most.

PART OF THE SERVE AND PROTECT FAMILY  
**POLICE/CU MILITARY/CU PRISON/CU**

**SERVE PROTECT**

# Families

As the response to the Coronavirus progresses, we will continue to be asked to adapt our behaviours and lifestyles. Many of us will need to adapt to working from home and those of us with children will face extra pressures to support their educational development and more general stimulation as well as continuing day-to-day caring responsibilities.

Alternatively, key workers may be continuing to send their children to nursery or school, which poses a very different challenge, including managing expectations.

Below are a few suggestions to support you and your family during these unprecedented times:

- **Establish a routine.** Set up specific times for reading/homework, chores, independent free time, mealtimes, family time and bedtime. It is likely that schools will have specific teaching programmes to follow as part of home educating. There are also a number of useful sites such as [Scholastic UK](#) who have put together a range of Free home learning packs for Early Years, KS1, Lower KS2 and Upper KS2 children which can be downloaded for free.
- **Make time for yourself.** Make sure your children know that you will plan blocks of time for yourself and that they will need to self-entertain, and if you are working from home that you are not to be disturbed during your work periods.
- **Free play.** While recognising that we need to distance ourselves from others, time outside and fresh air has huge benefits for physical and mental health.
- Although it may be warranted to **loosen screen rules**, try to outline set periods of time for gaming, watching TV and other media during the school week and on the weekends. Consider playing old-fashioned board games, or electronic games that can be played as a pair or group.
- **Retain to a sleep schedule.** Keeping to the same sleep routine that the children would have during the 'school' week will help maintain a sense of routine that is beneficial to their physical and mental health.
- **Stay connected.** Make sure you stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media. Rather than being on the phone or social media all day long yourself, try to schedule set times to check in with your adult friends and/or family.
- **Limit the news.** For your own mental health, and the mental health of your children, limit the intake of news and only get it from a trusted source. Constantly following the latest COVID-19 news may increase anxiety and whilst it is important to explain the

facts and be honest, try to avoid over-exposure to coverage of the virus.

- **Provide an outlet to discuss emotions.** Journaling is a good way for adolescents to process their feelings in this uncertain time. You can also set aside a

time to talk as a family about how everyone is feeling and coping with the outbreak



