

# HOW TO STAY WELL DURING THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

*5 key messages for people  
living with dementia*



The coronavirus outbreak has placed a strain on everyone, but especially those of us living with dementia. If you, or a friend or family member, currently live with dementia, here are some simple tips specially created to help make things more manageable.



### ***Stay safe and well***

Always stay three steps (two metres / six feet) away from anyone you don't live with and wash your hands regularly. If you develop a cough or a temperature of 38°C or higher, or start to feel breathless, phone 111. Seek and accept help – but only from people you know and trust, or a registered volunteer.



### ***Stay connected***

There are lots of ways to stay connected with friends and family, from phone calls and letters to online video calls. You can also feel closer to the important people in your life by thinking about them and looking at photographs.



### ***Keep a sense of purpose***

Make a list of jobs and pleasurable activities and create a daily routine that you enjoy. Keep up your usual daily activities such as washing, dressing, eating, cleaning, gardening and watching your favourite TV and radio programmes.



### ***Stay active***

Stay active in ways that you enjoy. Get some daily exercise outdoors if you can, or do some simple indoor exercises – like stretching if you can't.



### ***Stay positive***

This is a frustrating time, but try to be patient and thoughtful, and support each other. There will be good days and bad days, but if you're feeling anxious, try using relaxation techniques or call a helpline such as the Alzheimer's Society.

***We will get  
through this,  
and we will be  
together again.***

*Read on for more suggestions...*

## STAYING SAFE AND WELL

- + The first and most important thing is to keep yourself and others well. You should always follow government guidance on staying safe. You can check what to do by listening to BBC news on the TV or radio, or in your newspaper, or online.
- + Put signs up around the house as reminders, for example a sign in the kitchen to remind you to wash your hands, or a sign on the front door to stay three steps (two metres) away from people when you go out. If you cough or sneeze, catch it in your elbow or a tissue then throw the tissue away.
- + Try to have your food shopping delivered to your home. Many local shops will take a telephone order or, if you have access to the internet, you can order online.



- + Seek and accept help from trustworthy sources. Your council can put you in touch with local volunteer groups, just give them a call or visit their website. If you're not feeling well, a health professional should be able to organise support from the NHS volunteer service.
- + Keep up all your usual safety measures, such as locking doors or wearing a pendant alarm in case you fall. **Don't give cash or your bank card to anyone you don't know, and never give out personal details over the phone.**



## STAYING CONNECTED

Even though we can't meet friends face-to-face at the moment, we can still stay in touch by phone or by post. If you have access to the internet there are lots more ways to stay connected too.

Using a calendar can help you remember important things – such as when you plan to contact someone, special shopping hours, or when a delivery is due.

### By phone:

- + Make a list of people to phone and plan when to call each one.
- + Lots of phones have speed-dial options for numbers you call regularly, so see if someone can help you set this up.
- + If you can, use a video call service like Skype to connect with family and friends.
- + There are lots of people you can call for support or advice, such as the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Connect support line.



## **STAYING CONNECTED** (CONTINUED)

### **By post:**

- + Write letters or cards to loved ones and ask someone to post them for you.
- + If you receive letters or parcels yourself, remember to wash your hands after handling or opening them.

### **Online:**

- + Emailing friends can be an easy way to stay in touch, and to share photos and videos.
- + If you can get online, you could join an online group or discussion forum. There are thousands to choose, from the Alzheimer's Society Talking Point to groups dedicated to special hobbies and interests.
- + With so many people staying home, there are more ways to connect online than ever. Your friends or family might be able to help you talk to them using one of the most popular services such as WhatsApp or Skype.



### **In your thoughts:**

- + Spending time thinking about important people in your life who are not there with you can make you feel close to them any time you want.
- + You could look through photo albums, or make a life story book including photographs and written text.
- + Try to think about good times in your life – such as remembering a happy holiday – then make up and send a postcard as if you were there.
- + Start a diary to express your thoughts and feelings – you could do this by hand or on the computer.

### **Ways to connect more widely:**

- + You may still be able to talk to people through your window, from your front door, or across the garden. As long as they stay more than two metres away, you don't need to worry.
- + You could take the opportunity to make contact with people you haven't heard from for a while.
- + Try making a cheerful display in your front window or front garden.
- + Many people are putting a picture of a rainbow in their window as a symbol of hope. You could draw your own, or print or cut one out.



## **KEEPING A SENSE OF PURPOSE**

- + Make a plan for the next day every evening, so it's ready for when you wake up.
- + You could even pin your timetable on the fridge or on the wall, or use a whiteboard.
- + It could be a plan for just one day or a whole week. Include all the things you plan to do and how long for.
- + Make a list of things to do and tick each one off when you finish it. Include activities to look forward to as well as tasks you need to get done.

## **STAYING ACTIVE**

- + Try to have a balance of stimulating and relaxing activities. If you can go online, there are lots of suggested activities on the Alzheimer's Society website.
- + Have different places in your home for different activities.
- + You can often find exercise sessions on TV or online, so make time to do a bit of research and find ones you like.
- + Adapt activities that you would normally do outdoors. For example, you could go for a 'chat and stroll' around a table with someone you live with, and choose a topic to talk about.



- + Make sure you get plenty of daylight and fresh air. Just sitting by your window or in your front doorway can give you a little boost of wellbeing.
- + Watch what's going on, and try to appreciate what you can see from your own window.
- + If you can, put some food out for the birds so that you can watch them from your window.





## STAYING POSITIVE

+ If you feel anxious or agitated, try some breathing or relaxation exercises, or listen to some soothing music.

**For breathing:** count to three whilst taking a deep breath in through your nose, then count to three again as you breathe out through your mouth. Repeat this three times.

**For relaxation:** lift your shoulders up to your ears as hard as you can and then relax them. Repeat this three times.

+ Don't keep worrying about the things you can't do. Use the skills you have and think about what you CAN do.

- + Keep doing the things you enjoy, as much as possible.
- + Do things that reduce the need to go out shopping, such as baking cakes or bread.
- + Set yourself a challenge. Try something new. If you have an interest that has lapsed, why not pick it back up again?



## Getting information you can trust

Having reliable sources of information is essential. You can access regular updates from the BBC on the TV or radio, and if you want to speak to someone you can call:

- + Alzheimer's Society Dementia Connect support line **0333 150 3456**
- + The Silver Line **0800 4 70 80 90**
- + For NHS health advice call **111** (or visit [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk))

If you are online, you can also access lots more useful information from reliable websites:

- + **Alzheimer's Society** [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)
- + **Age UK** [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk) / Age Cymru [www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru)
- + **The NHS** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- + **The BBC** [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)
- + **The Government** [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) / [www.gov.wales](http://www.gov.wales)
- + **Public Health England** [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england)
- + Your local council

This leaflet is part-funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Policy Research Unit in Older People and Frailty. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.



Alzheimer's  
Society

UNIVERSITY OF  
EXETER

NIHR | Policy Research Unit  
Older People and Frailty

NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration  
South West Peninsula