



COVID 19: Impact of lock-down on mental health and tips to overcome



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The prime minister of India has declared a three-week nationwide lock-down starting from midnight the 25th of March 2020 to the 14th of April 2020, explaining that it was an essential and effective measure for breaking the COVID-19 infection cycle. Social distancing is a critical means to break the cycle of infection. There is a significant decrease in growth rate and increased doubling time of cases because of the lock-down (Lau et al., 2020).

In addition to various psychological problems like depression, anxiety, and panic disorder, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe threats to the lives and physical health of people around the globe. (Qiu et al., 2020). In response to the problems posed by the pandemic, various public health strategies such as isolation of infected or at-risk persons, reduction of social contact, and simple hygiene like frequent hand wash, have been advised to reduce the risk of infection. Although isolation helps in achieving the goal of reducing infections, reduced access to family, friends, and other social support systems causes loneliness increasing mental issues like anxiety and depression. (Zhou et al., 2020).

During such stressful situations, the concerned government, hospitals, educational institutions, organizations, and even individuals need to look into psychological intervention and adopt necessary measures. In addition to educating individuals to stay isolated, it is vital to educate and prepare them to face the mental health issues they may endure during the period. Hence, the following tips provided in the table below helps to overcome the impacts of lock-down on mental health (Banerjee, 2020; Dickerson, 2020; Zandifar and Badrfam, 2020).

Impact	Tips
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize the fear. Remember that you are not isolated in feeling insecure. Planning the daily routines helps in adapting quickly and managing anxiety. Divide your time clearly as work and non-work times. Make the same division in your headspace too. Identify an activity/hobby that brings you joy and perform it.
Loneliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in short bursts with clear breaks will help to maintain your clarity of thought. Several community teams have developed interactive platforms. Be active in groups you like. Spend time with loved ones. Be in touch with friends, family, and colleagues over social media or the phone. Pick a new hobby. Learn something new every day. Keep your mind engaged. Pen down your thoughts and emotions regularly.
Difficulty in concentrating, low motivation and a state of distraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember, It takes time to adapt. Pick a physical activity of your choice like Yoga or even simple stretches. Spend atleast one hour per day on your physical health. It is a good idea to meditate. Meditation improves concentration. It is important to be rational regarding the expectations we set for ourselves as well as for those in care of us. Do not have high expectations of others because they are sailing in the same boat.
Stress threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize your physical and mental health Exercise regularly, eat healthy food and sleep thoroughly. It is a good idea to meditate. Meditation improves concentration and reduces mental stress.
Negative emotional spirals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not Google symptoms of any disease, trust doctors. Avoid frequently checking the latest COVID statistics. Do not be hesitant to seek help. Keep time aside every day for breathing exercises and meditation.
Desperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with habits like smoking and alcohol consuming, are desperate to have cigarettes or alcohol. Take this positively as a challenge to change habits by engaging yourself in meditation or Yoga. Distract yourself with new hobbies or family discussions when you feel the urge to smoke or drink.

Panic and fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep in mind; you are not alone. • Be frank about experiencing panic and fear. • Consult the doctor or the person you trust to share your feelings and something uplifting.
Financial strain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult a financial advisor over the phone and common platform to discuss new government policies. • Also, it is good practice to read about various investment and earning options.
Apprehension about Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is common to have apprehensions and panic regarding the future. However, worrying does not help. • Avoid speculation and focus on facts. Do not believe everything you read. Confirm your suspicions. • Remember, humanity has seen worse, and every time we have bounced back. We will, again. Being hopeful is the key.

Mental health is a crucial aspect that needs to be addressed during this lock-down as all modes of communication revolve around the virus.

Although every single citizen needs to contribute to this war against the virus by performing all the necessary measures, especially social distancing, the government of India has clearly understood that it cannot be fought alone. The government of India is performing on several fronts to preserve the mental health and morale of all the citizens. The central government has taken measures in this regard and has ensured the seepage of rules and measures to both state and local administration. The following are some of the measures, which directly or indirectly contribute to the mental health of the citizens of the country:

1 Information sharing through website to reduce ambiguity and/or panic

- The government-controlled COVID 19 website, '<https://www.mygov.in/covid-19/>', provides all the necessary information related to the pandemic. This includes videos and readable material on the infection and the necessary measures to be undertaken.
- This website provides essential real-time information regarding the actual count of cases found to be positive, the number of recovered cases and the number of deaths. This helps citizens to know official information rather than panicking over false information.
- Further, to ensure that there is no ambiguity among citizens regarding any false/unverified information in social media, the website provides a section on 'Myth Busters.'
- Various helpline numbers have been shared through the website. The government has launched a central helpline number for coronavirus: - +91 - 11-23978046, for any inquiry about COVID 19.
- Also, very essentially, and in relevance to the topic of this article, a toll-free helpline number "+91 - 80-45110007" has been launched by the "National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences" (NIMHANS), a Bengaluru based premier medical institution.

2 Training and development activities

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, has provided health advisories, videos, posters and even conducted webinars on handling mental health issues of individuals and children. More information on the same can be obtained at '<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>,' a government-administered website.

3 Measures to reduce financial strain

- The latest step to reduce the financial strain on citizens is an optional moratorium on EMIs of loans. In respect of all term loans (including agricultural term loans, retail and crop loans), all commercial banks (including regional rural banks, small finance banks, and local area banks), co-operative banks, all-India Financial

Institutions, and NBFCs (including housing finance companies) ("lending institutions") are permitted to grant a moratorium of three months on payment of all instalments falling due between 1st March 2020 and 31st May 2020. The repayment schedule for such loans as also the residual tenor will be shifted across the board by three months after the moratorium period.

- In respect of working capital facilities sanctioned in the form of cash credit/overdraft ("CC/OD"), lending institutions are permitted to defer the recovery of interest applied in respect of all such facilities during the period from 1st March 2020 and 31st May 2020 ("deferment").

Hence, this article addresses some of the necessary information regarding the challenges of mental health and the probable quick fixes, go-to points of contact, and other relevant information. It is imperative that every individual take care of their physical and mental health to stop the ongoing pandemic.

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