

COPING WITH AN EATING DISORDER DURING CORONAVIRUS



& anorexia
bulimia
care

A NOTE FROM THE TEAM AT ABC

We understand that although these are worrying times for us all, please remember you are not alone, and we are here to help. We continue to provide our email and telephone support services, and, although we may be busier than usual, we can still offer support and information to help you navigate these uncertain times.

In creating this document, we asked our support and office team for their top tips and guidance for coping with an eating disorder during the Coronavirus situation. We hope you find it helpful and reassuring.

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THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON THOSE WITH EATING DISORDERS



Whilst the impact of Coronavirus is a concern for everyone, for those living with an eating disorder it may increase anxiety and feelings of physical and emotional vulnerability.

Once we understand the increased possibility of physical or mental health problems because of this situation, we are better able to take precautions to proactively manage our health.

Whilst everyone's experience of an eating disorder is different, the focus on availability of food and the associated media coverage may be triggering or difficult for those with an eating disorder. Foods that would normally feel "safe" to a person may be temporarily unavailable and this can also increase feelings of anxiety.

Those with a restrictive eating disorder may have thoughts justifying eating inadequate quantities of food and/or calories due to food availability issues. Conversely, those who have a binge eating disorder may react to perceived food scarcity by bingeing.

It is also a difficult time for those that are caring for, or supporting, a loved one with an eating disorder. Knowing how to manage a new routine at home or maintain an existing one particularly in relation to meals can be especially difficult and in turn this can create additional anxiety and worry.

We have compiled some tips and strategies to help you and your loved ones manage at this time.

Most importantly, if you are struggling with an eating disorder right now or have done in the past and difficult thoughts are creeping in again, know you are not failing at recovery. It is never a linear process and there will always be setbacks to navigate.

You can also find a list of ABC's support services and other helpful resources on the back page of this document.

REMEMBER

During a stressful time, it is natural to feel unsettled but remind yourself this will pass. Talk to your friends, family, trusted professionals and of course us here at ABC. Most of all be kind to yourself and soon you will get back on track.



BE PROACTIVE IN MANAGING YOUR NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS



Tips from Mel, ABC Office Team

- 1** Read news and media coverage of Coronavirus from trusted sources only, such as Gov.uk and reputable news channels.
- 2** Limit the time spent watching or reading the news each day. Switch off breaking news notifications on your phone and set aside 15-30 minutes each day to catch up. Or if you prefer, ask a friend or family member to update you on anything important.
- 3** Be social media savvy. There is a lot of misinformation out there so be selective about who you follow. If necessary, temporarily reduce your social media circle to trusted or known contacts only. Most platforms allow you to 'mute' an account.
- 4** If the news is anxiety inducing, find some relaxation methods that work for you, listening to your favourite album, some gentle yoga or meditation.

WHY NOT TRY

We like the Headspace app who are offering free guided meditations during Coronavirus, or Calm which includes a music collection to help you drift off to sleep.

ORGANISE YOUR HOME SPACE

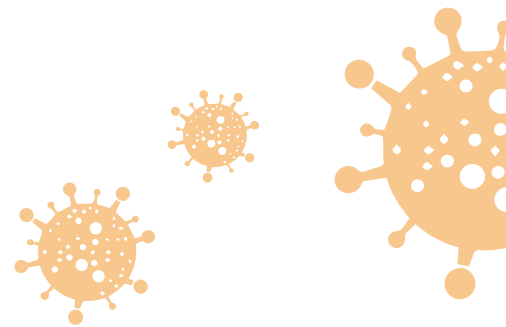
Tips from Rosie, Support Hub Team

- 1** Create 'zones' around your flat or house. It can be helpful to divide space up for work/school and creative/relaxation stuff. If space is tight, even allocating one side of your desk or table for different tasks helps you feel a sense of achievement in each area.
- 2** Get outside. Even if you don't have a garden, try to build some fresh air into each day. Throw open the windows, stick a jumper on if its cold and breathe. Sunshine, breeze and even a few raindrops on our skin can help us to feel more grounded and connected to nature.
- 3** If you need something to distract yourself, why not use the downtime to re-organise your wardrobes or cupboards? We've all got stuff we no longer use, and clutter builds up easily. Create piles to sort once lockdown restrictions are lifted. Some could go to your local charity shop once its open, or perhaps you could organise a clothes swap with friends and get some new stuff in the process.

COPING WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING AND STAYING AT HOME

Tips from Mel, ABC Office Team and Rosie, Support Hub Team

- 1** Social distancing means physically distancing yourself from people but that doesn't mean you can't socialise at all. Speak to friends and family online, host a Netflix watch party, play games with friends on Messenger or get a group of people together for a "pub quiz" through Zoom or Skype.
- 2** Use support services as and when you need to. ABC's helplines and support services are still running. (See Resources section for full details).
- 3** Create a new routine for yourself. Whether you are working from home, are furloughed, or not working/going to school or college currently, creating a routine is really helpful.
- 4** Aim to get up at the same time each day, build in some outdoors time/fresh air if you can, stick to regular mealtimes, carve out time for fun/socialising/hobbies.
- 5** Organise a daily/weekly catch up with friends or family. Whether it's a phone call, Zoom, Hangout, or FaceTime, there's so many ways we can stay in touch with each other.

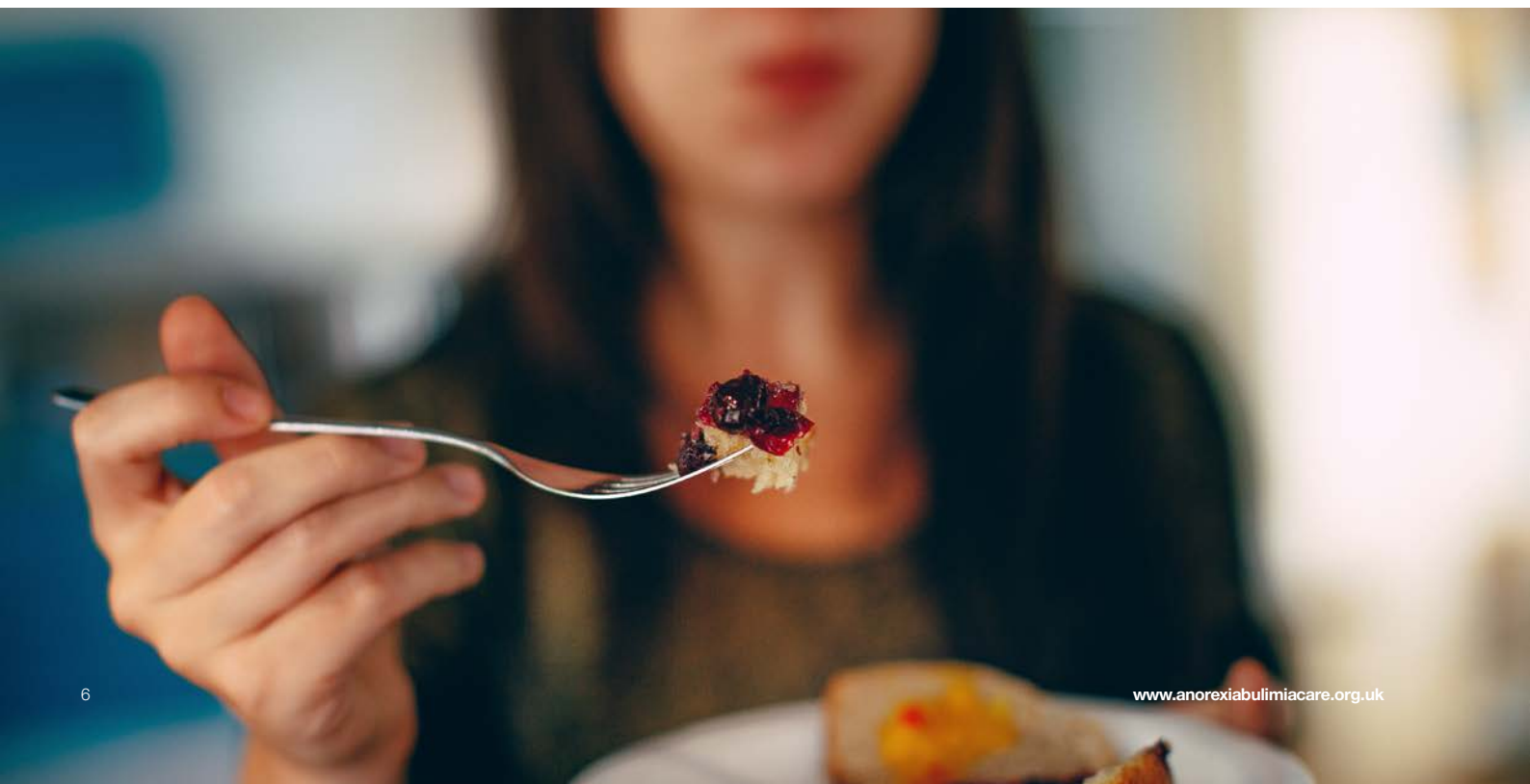


- 6 This could be the perfect time to try that new hobby or learn a new skill. Teach yourself to code, knit, cook, or sing. Perhaps you fancy writing your first short story or learning a language. There's a range of free courses available. Try FutureLearn or the Open University for some inspiration.
- 7 If you're struggling with doing less exercise at the moment because gyms are closed, remember this is temporary. Gentle exercise can be done at home but know that it is okay to slow down for a while. Exercising less for a short time won't do any harm and actually might be the break your body needs during a time of difficulty.

MAINTAIN HEALTHY FOOD HABITS

Tips from Belinda and Rosie, Support Hub Team

- 1 Stick to your normal eating and mealtimes routine as much as possible. Structure and familiarity will help you both physically and mentally...
- 2 ...But also accept that some adaptability might be needed. And that is perfectly OK.
- 3 If you can't get a particular food, try something else within that food group. For example, if there are no melons, try oranges. If there's no bread, try crumpets or tea cakes. If there's no pasta, try rice or noodles. Substituting may also help to broaden your list of safe foods and find a new favourite.
- 4 If you are seeing a therapist such as a counsellor or dietitian, try to maintain your appointments wherever possible. Many are happy to work over Zoom, Skype or even the phone.
- 5 Try not to label food as 'good' or 'bad'. If you can't follow your normal meal plan exactly, cut yourself some slack and know that you are doing your best under extraordinary circumstances.



EAT TO SUPPORT YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Tips from Belinda, Support Hub Team



1 Include the following nutrients in your diet to help nourish your immune system:

VITAMIN C

Your immune system needs it to function correctly and increase the body's resistance against infection.

Try: kiwis, strawberries, oranges, broccoli, blackcurrants, brussel sprouts, lemons, sweet yellow peppers, sweet potatoes.

VITAMIN D

Can alter how your immune system functions and a lack of Vitamin D is associated with increased autoimmunity as well as an increased susceptibility to infection.

Try: fatty fish like mackerel and salmon, beef liver, cheese, eggs, foods fortified with Vitamin D e.g. plant milk and cereals.

VITAMIN E

A powerful antioxidant that enhances the immune system and increases the production of specialised immune cells.

Try: sunflower seeds, olives, olive oil, almonds, almond butter, avocado, tomatoes, spinach.

OMEGA 3

A source of fatty acids that help activate immune cells, as well as regulate their activity.

Try: oily fish (salmon, herring, mackerel, sardines, anchovies), flaxseeds, flaxseed oil, chia seeds, walnuts, walnut oil.

ZINC

A mineral crucial for the normal functioning of immune system.

Try: meat and poultry, shellfish, legumes (eg. chickpeas, lentils, beans), spinach, pumpkin seeds, brown rice, dairy, eggs, dark chocolate.

HYDRATION

Staying hydrated will support your immune system and help nutrients to be absorbed.

Try: adding a slice of cucumber, sprig of mint or a raspberry or two.

2 Bored of plain water? Many fruit and vegetables also contain water so make a smoothie as a snack or as part of breakfast.

TRY THIS SMOOTHIE

Put 2 handfuls of fruit of your choice such as bananas, strawberries or blueberries into a blender. Add 1 handful of veg, spinach or cucumber work well, 1 handful of nuts, 150g yogurt or 200ml milk of your choice (cow or plant based) and blend 'til smooth.

MANAGING SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

Tips from Claire, Helpline Team and Nurse

- 1** Keep in mind that you can't control everything about a situation. When something or someone around you is causing you anxiety, try to remember that the one thing you can control is your reaction to that person or situation.
- 2** Focusing on your breathing is something you can do every day at any time and only takes a few minutes.

TRY THIS

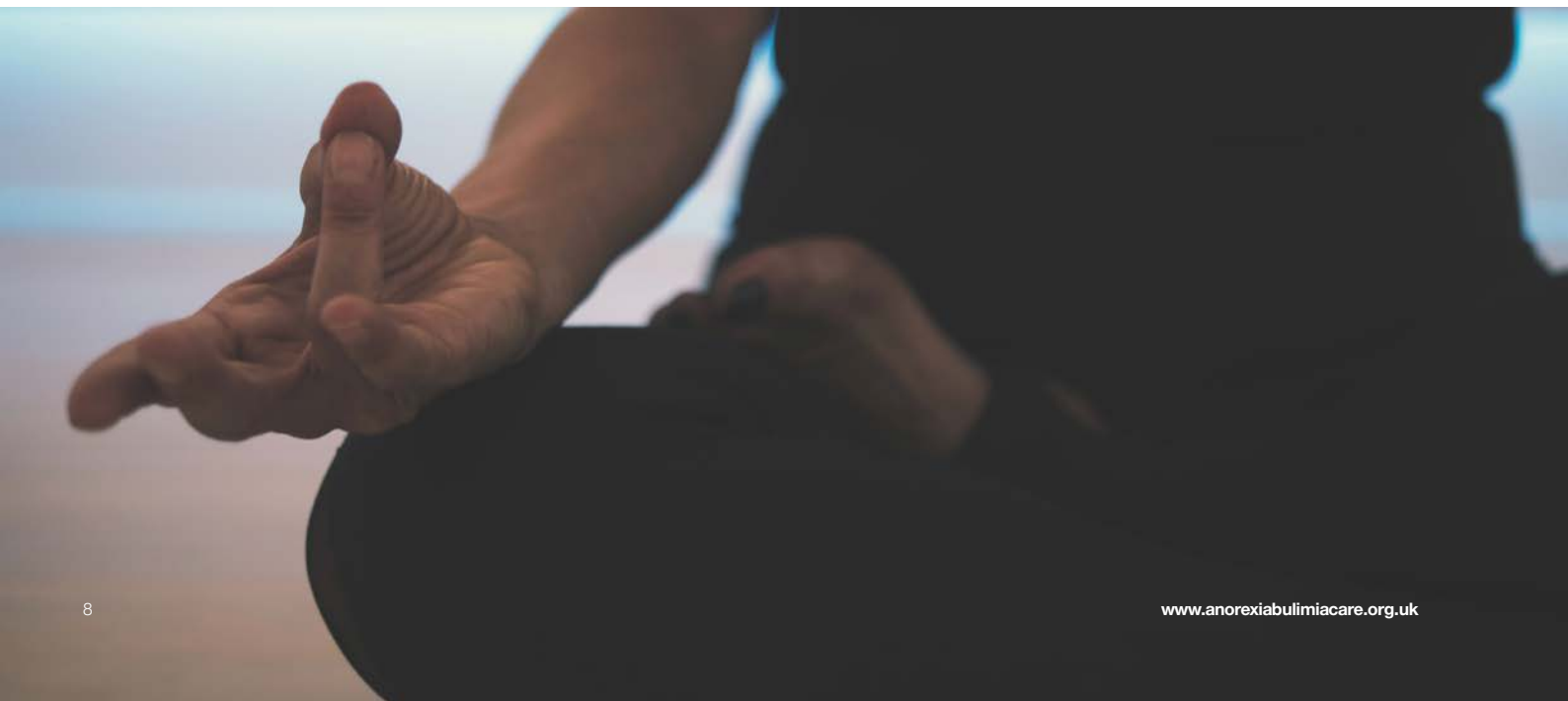
A simple breathing exercise for when you feel anxiety levels creeping upwards:

Take a long, slow breath in through your nose, first filling your lower lungs, then your upper lungs.

Hold your breath to the count of three.

Exhale slowly through pursed lips, while you relax the muscles in your face, jaw, shoulders, and stomach.

- 3** Talking to a trusted friend, colleague, family member, GP or counsellor can really help get things into perspective when anxiety strikes.
- 4** Do some gentle or moderate exercise. It's a great way to relieve tension and help your body feel relaxed. Yoga is particularly helpful as it incorporates an awareness of your breathing and sense of self in the moment.
- 5** Avoid caffeine and nicotine, which can make anxiety symptoms worse. They have a stimulant effect on the central nervous system and so will exacerbate symptoms such as rapid heartrate.
- 6** Avoid alcohol or unprescribed drugs for relief. Alcohol particularly acts as a depressant so will ultimately make anxiety worse.



FOODS TO HELP MANAGE ANXIETY

Tips from Belinda, Support Hub Team

- 1** Eat protein. Protein is made up of amino acids which the brain uses to regulate emotions and feelings.
Try: high quality meats, pulses, eggs, fish, dairy, nuts and seeds.
 - 2** Combine protein and complex carbohydrates to support mood, sleep and anxiety levels.
Try: protein (see #1) with potato, sweet potato, whole grains, oats, beans, peas or squash.
 - 3** Don't forget your B vitamins. Deficiencies are connected with depression and anxiety.
Try: dark green, leafy veg like spinach or broccoli, brown rice, milk, eggs and legumes.
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CARING FOR A LOVED ONE AT HOME

Tips from Joanna, Support Hub Team and Parent

- 1** Take the pressure off your loved one (and you). It may be tempting to think that now you have more time together at home, it's a perfect opportunity to make lots of progress. But during a challenging time, this can easily lead to conflict.
- 2** Have a primary target of staying where things are and not slipping backwards.
- 3** Remember that achieving any small goals at the moment is progress.
- 4** Given you will be sharing the same space for more time than usual, focus on your relationship the most. This will be more likely to create the foundation of calm needed to enable positive change.
- 5** Try to take the focus off food, and enjoy doing things together such as:
 - Walking (the dog)
 - Playing games with other family/household members.
 - Watching favourite films and TV shows.
 - Doing gardening projects together or anything else creative.
 - Listening to music, and any other calming activities that have been helpful before eg. meditation, yoga.
- 6** Share meals outside if you can. Being surrounded by nature will be a positive influence.

- 7 Try to look after your own anxiety as a parent/carer. Identify your own needs and make sure you have enough time to yourself. If you feel less anxious, that will benefit your relationship.
- 8 If the person you are caring for has come home from somewhere else where they have established a routine, eg, university, try to incorporate some of this routine into your time at home. For example, by incorporating meals that feel 'safe' to your loved one.
- 9 Plan meals ahead as shopping for food takes longer at the moment.
- 10 Try to reduce potential for conflict - think about what is really important and what isn't.
- 11 Agreeing acceptable substitutions for something that is unavailable before you shop will really help reduce the potential for extra stress and conflict.
- 12 Encourage conversation, over as wide a range of topics as possible. Find out something new about each other.
- 13 Say those things that you've been meaning to say and often get lost in the speed of ordinary life.
- 14 Reflect on your journey so far and appreciate the progress that has been made.
- 15 Think about the future too - make some plans individually and together.

CARING FOR A LOVED ONE AT A DISTANCE



Tips from Joanna, Support Hub Team and Parent

- 1 Try to stay in close contact to create and maintain a solid relationship. If your relationship is strong, the person you are caring for is more likely to tell you how they really are.
- 2 Consider setting up a routine for keeping in touch. For example, set up group chats with wider family or friendship groups using Skype, FaceTime, Zoom or WhatsApp.
- 3 Explore opportunities for group chats with wider family or friendship groups. It's OK to ask for your family and friends' help and everyone needs a kind word and chat at the moment.
- 4 Try watching films/TV shows together via platforms such as Netflix Party or any video chat platforms.
- 5 Listen to any worries openly and work together to find a solution.
- 6 Focus on what is really important and try to avoid conflict. When separated it can be easy to feel uneasy or misunderstood.
- 7 Spend a little time each day reflecting on the progress made, however small.
- 8 Don't be afraid to look ahead and make some plans together for the future.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

ANOREXIA & BULIMIA CARE (ABC)

www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk

Telephone support (9.30am – 5.30pm Tues-Fri)

Helpline for personal support:

03000 11 12 13 option 1

Helpline for parents/carers, family & friends:

03000 11 12 13 option 2

Email support

Support@anorexiabulimiare.org.uk

familyandfriends@anorexiabulimiare.org.uk

Support Hub, currently online service (9.30am-4.15pm every Thursday)

Video call or online messaging support and information for individuals and parents/carers/family <https://www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk/help-for-you/face-to-face-support>

Befriending service

One to one recovery support service (weekly for 6 months)

<https://www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk/help-for-you/befriending>

Parent and carer online community

Online forum to share concerns, questions and experiences.

https://www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk/online_community

MIND

Mental health helplines and information for people of all ages

Website: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Coronavirus information hub: <https://www.mind.org.uk/coronavirus-we-are-here-for-you/>

Infoline: **0300 123 3393** (9am – 6pm Mon-Fri)

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Text: **86463**

SAMARITANS

24 hours/365 days a year listening and support service

National: Call **116 123** free from any phone (24 hours)

Email jo@samaritans.org

Website: <https://www.samaritans.org/>

SHOUT 24/7

Text service for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere.

Free on all major mobile networks

Website: <https://www.giveusashout.org/>

Text: Shout to **85258**

YOUNGMINDS CRISIS MESSENGER

free 24/7 support across the UK for young people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Text: 'YM' to **85258**

Papyrus prevention of young suicide, under 35 years

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org/

Call: **0800 068 41 41** (9am-10pm weekdays, 2pm-10pm weekends)

Text: **07786 209697**

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

CALM

Helplines and webchat dedicated to prevention of male suicide

Website: www.thecalmzone.net/

Call: **0800 58 58 58** (5pm-midnight every day)

Webchat: www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat/ (5pm-midnight)

YOUNG MINDS PARENTS HELPLINE

Advice for parents/carers concerned about their child's mental health.

Website: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/>

Parent's helpline: Call **0808 802 5544**

Parent's helpline web contact form: <https://youngminds.org.uk/contact-us/parents-helpline-enquiries/>

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Call **999** from any phone, or contact your GP's out of hours service



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Telephone: **03000 11 12 13**

Support Line: Option 1


Family and Friends: Option 2

mail@anorexiabulimiare.org.uk

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 @abccharity

 @ABC_Charity

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