



# Coping with COVID

Perinatal Support Newsletter

*You are not alone, we're in this together and we're here to help*



ssg-tr.perinatalswlstg@nhs.net



@swlstgperinatal



0203 513 6577



## What a year!!

We have all had to adapt our behaviour during the last year in response to Covid 19 and it is easy to recognize the impact on our mental and physical wellbeing, both in ourselves and others. Focusing on behaviour has long been the underpinning of many theories around health and this newsletter focuses on such an approach to guide us all to make adjustments that can support our well being in both the short and long term.

The **ABC PLEASE** model from Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) is about developing skills in managing our mood and emotions. The first (**ABC**) is about making sure that we regularly spend time doing things that will improve our mood. The second (**PLEASE**) involves taking care of our bodies to reduce our vulnerability to emotional mind.

**A Accumulate positive emotions:** We all need positive events in our lives if we want to be happy. On a regular basis, make sure you're engaging in enjoyable and valued activities, that contribute to short and long term happiness.

**Short-term, positive events are experiences that make us feel better right now.**

GO FOR A WALK, TALK TO A FRIEND, HAVE DOWN-TIME, WATCH A MOVIE,  
REMEMBER POSITIVE PAST EXPERIENCES, LISTEN TO MUSIC, SPEND TIME WITH  
YOUR PET, SING, WATCH A COMEDIAN ON YOUTUBE, DANCE, THINK POSITIVE THINGS  
ABOUT THE FUTURE, ORGANIZE YOUR ROOM OR HOME, PLAN SOMETHING FUN.

**Longer term positive activities are important in a different way as they give us a more enduring sense of satisfaction.**

MAKE TIME FOR PRAYER, MEDITATION OR SPIRITUALITY, ATTEND RELIGIOUS  
SERVICES, WORKING TOWARD FURTHERING YOUR EDUCATION, MAINTAINING  
RELATIONSHIPS BY STAYING IN TOUCH, DOING SOMETHING KIND FOR SOMEONE,  
SPENDING TIME WITH YOUR CHILDREN, KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH SUPPORTIVE FRIENDS  
AND FAMILY MEMBERS

**B Build mastery:** Mastery is the feeling we get when we succeed at something. It is the sense that we are competent, capable people. Engaging in activities that help us feel this way about ourselves on a regular basis can make us less vulnerable to negative emotions and helps us be better prepared to cope with tough situations. A good mastery activity is one that's a bit challenging, so we feel a sense of accomplishment.

SHOWERING / BATHING / PERSONAL CARE, PAYING YOUR BILLS, ORGANIZING OR  
FIXING SOMETHING THAT NEEDS IT, COOKING A MEAL, CHECKING IN / HELPING A  
LOVED ONE, PHYSICAL EXERCISE, DOING HOUSEHOLD CHORES, DOING A PUZZLE

**C Cope ahead:** We all face emotionally difficult situations. If you have one on the horizon, especially one when historically your emotions have gotten the better of you in the past, plan how you'll respond when it happens. This needs to be a conscious and intentional process, often involving visualizing yourself in the situation, thinking about what emotions you might have and how to handle them.



**PL** **Physical illness:** Emotions are not only mental but physical experiences; we feel them in our bodies. If we don't take care of our bodies by treating our illnesses, we will be poorly prepared to cope with emotionally difficult situations when they arise. When we don't feel our physical best, we are less able to cope with various stressors. Do take prescribed medications, visit a doctor when needed and follow through on medical recommendations. Remember this includes our sexual health and contraception.

**E** **Balance eating:** A balanced diet and eating regularly when, how, what and how much your body needs, will support your emotional health. When pregnant, you don't need a special diet, although there are some foods you should be careful with or avoid, (see [www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/foods-to-avoid/](http://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/foods-to-avoid/)). Again, if breastfeeding, be mindful that traces of what you eat and drink can pass through to breast milk, including the stimulant caffeine which is found in chocolate, energy drinks, tea and coffee. You may also consider taking a vitamin D supplement.

**A** **Avoid mood-altering substances:** People use mood-altering drugs for a reason — they often make us feel better in the short term. Happiness, however, is a long-term pursuit. Drugs and alcohol often get in the way. They can be harmful to an unborn baby and alcohol also passes through breast milk, and hence overall it is safest to not drink alcohol. See [www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/healthy-diet/food-and-drinks-to-avoid/#anchor-tabs](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/healthy-diet/food-and-drinks-to-avoid/#anchor-tabs)

**S** **Balance Sleep:** None of us are at our emotional best when we don't have adequate sleep. Try to have a regular wake time each day that doesn't vary too widely, be mindful of your sleeping environment, avoid caffeine and screens leading up to going to bed, and try to get outdoors during the day.

**E** **Get exercise:** Exercise has physical effects on the body and on the brain that help us regulate mood; take advantage of these effects by being physically active on a regular basis. What form of exercise is best? The kind that you enjoy and is sustainable for you.



## Smoking

Protecting your baby from tobacco smoke is **one of the best things you can do to give your child a healthy start in life.**

It can be difficult to stop smoking, but never too late!

When you stop there are plenty of benefits:

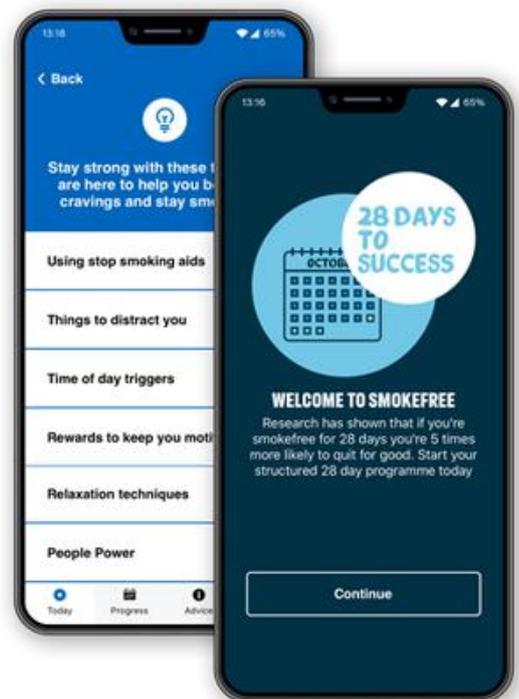
1. Less risk of complications during pregnancy and birth
2. Healthier pregnancy and baby
3. Reduce risk of still birth
4. Less likely to be born early or have any complications associated with being premature
5. Baby is less likely to be born with a low birth weight – on average babies of smokers are 200g lighter than other babies which can cause problems such as increase risk of infections
6. Reduce risk of sudden infant death syndrome or ‘cot death’
7. Less likely for the child to suffer asthma or other illnesses in the future

The sooner you stop smoking, the better, even in the last few weeks of your pregnancy. Here are some resources to help:

**Please call NHS Smokefree helpline: 0300 123 1044**



**Download the free  
NHS Smokefree  
app**



## **Sexual health**

The vagina naturally changes after birth, including:

1. A wider vagina. The swelling and redness post birth should start to reduce a few days after baby is born. Pelvic floor exercises are recommended. This will help prevent incontinence and increase the firmness of the vagina. Please do:
  - squeeze and draw in your anus at the same time, and close up and draw your vagina upwards
  - do it quickly, tightening and releasing the muscles immediately
  - then do it slowly, holding the contractions for as long as you can, but no more than 10 seconds, before you relax
  - repeat each exercise 10 times, 4 to 6 times a day
2. Dryness in the vagina. For those breastfeeding, oestrogen can be lower which increases vaginal dryness. Consider buying lubricant if the problem persists.
3. Soreness and stitches in the vaginal area. This should improve 6-12 weeks after birth. Pelvic floor exercises are recommended! Ensure you have adequate painkillers and clean the perineal area with a bath or shower daily.
4. Pain during sex: there's no right or wrong time to start again post birth. Don't rush into it. If your vagina feels dry, try lubricant during sex to see if that helps, if pain persists please see your GP and ask your health visitor to check the healing. Don't forget contraception!

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/vagina-changes-after-childbirth/>

**For further Sexual Health and contraception advice you can talk to your GP or contact your local GUM clinic**

- The Courtyard Clinic at St George's Hospital – 020 8725 3353
- The Wolverton Centre at Kingston hospital – 020 8974 9331
- The Sexual Health Clinic at St Helier Hospital – 020 8296 3910
- National Sexual Health Helpline 0300 123 7123



## Self soothing



There are many ways to relieve stress and among them are what we sometimes call "self-soothing" skills or techniques. These are simple things that you can do wherever you're at that can bring calm to your mind and body.

### Touch

- Your skin is the largest organ in your body and it is very sensitive to external stimulus. This makes it a powerful tool in your ability to relax, unwind, and find relief from the stress that you're feeling.
- Soaking in a warm bath, changing into your most comfortable clothes, stretch your muscles, massage, stroke your pet.

### Taste

- While it's best to try not to turn to food for comfort all the time, there is something to be said about its effects on mood. Many of us have learned that hunger can lead to irritability and this can impact stress levels as well.
- Try sucking on hard candy or sipping a cup of soothing herbal tea, enjoy a comforting meal and try to include healthy foods so you maintain a healthy body as well as a healthy mind.

### Smell

- Take advantage of soothing scents – fresh flowers, a deep breath of fresh air, scented candles or diffusers.

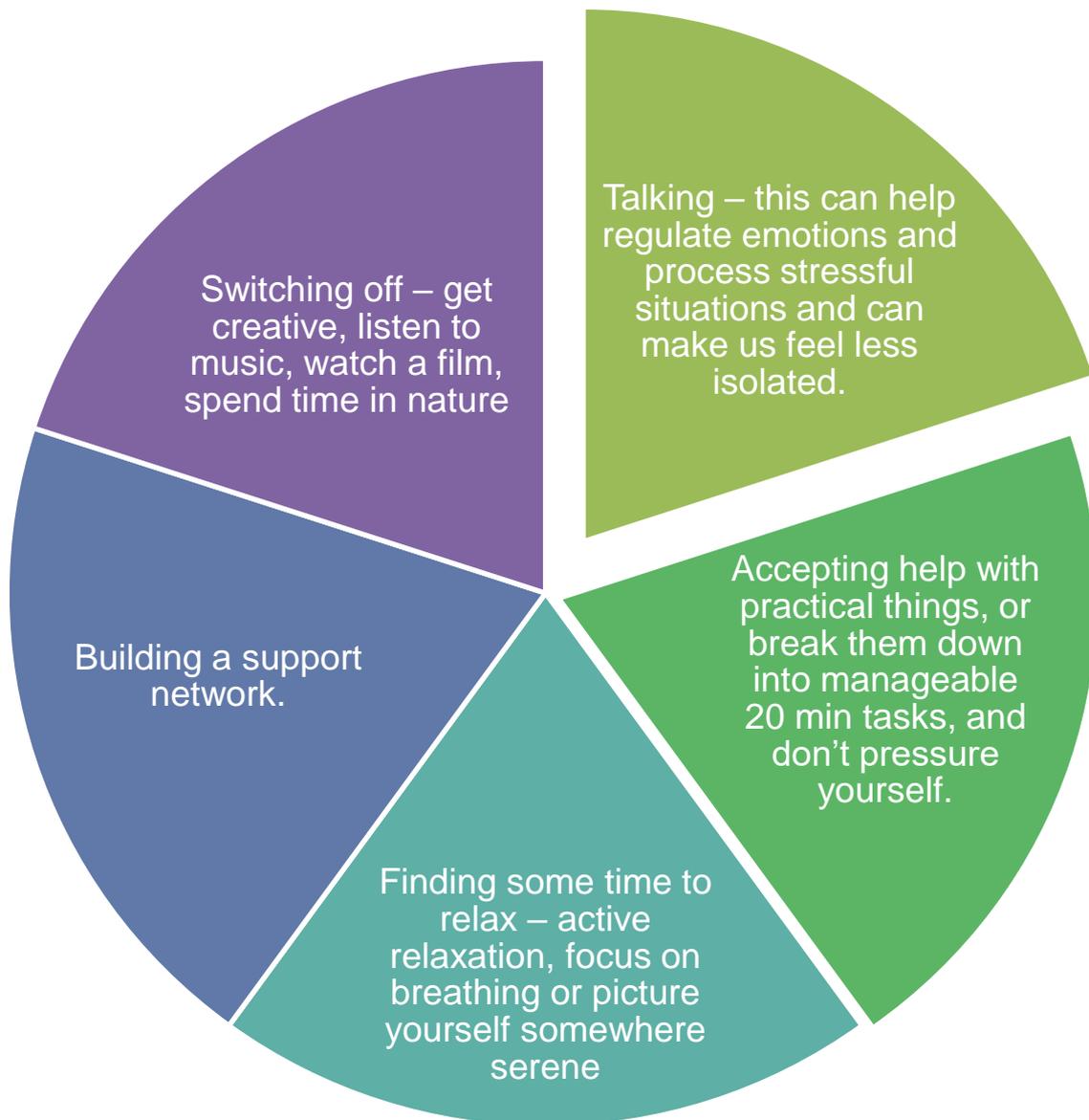
### Sight

- Distractions can be a good thing and sometimes it's helpful to find something amusing or interesting to look at, like reading a good book, watching a funny movie or television show, or simply watching the clouds pass by. Many people also find it beneficial to reflect on happy times or hopes and dreams. You might want to look through pictures of your loved ones or a past vacation that was filled with fun and joy. Of course, you can also daydream about places you want to visit. Look for things around you that make you smile and it's likely the stress will dissipate.

### Sound

- Sounds can support a positive emotional state - try listening to relaxing music, singing to yourself or playing an instrument. Or you might even try saying positive statements to yourself as a verbal form of self-encouragement.

## Self care ideas



Needing a dessert pick me up - try this healthier January recipe

## **Cherry Berry Crumble Recipe**

### **Ingredients**

- 200g frozen cherries
- 200g frozen summer fruits
- 150g plain flour
- 75g lower-fat spread
- 30g porridge oats
- 1 tbsp demerara or granulated sugar
- 12 tbsp low-fat, lower-sugar plain yoghurt, to serve

### **Method**

1. Preheat the oven to 180C, fan oven 160C, gas mark 4.

2 Put the frozen cherries and berries into a baking dish (there's no need to thaw them).

Use any combination of frozen fruits, such as raspberries or fruits of the forest.

3 Put the flour into a large mixing bowl and add the lower-fat spread, rubbing it in with your fingertips until the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs. Stir in the porridge oats and sugar.

4 Sprinkle the crumble topping evenly over the fruit. Place the dish on a baking tray and bake for 30 to 35 minutes. Serve with 2 tablespoons of yoghurt per person.

Try adding a few drops of vanilla extract to the yoghurt to add some more flavour.

**And enjoy!!**



As we welcome 2021 and enter another lockdown, it is more important than ever that we take regular time to look after ourselves. Parenting is rewarding but can also be stressful, and sometimes we need to prioritize ourselves. We all need time to recharge and although it can be difficult to find the time, a few minutes can make a difference.



Please look after yourselves and others, and reach out for support if needed.



## Resources for January health living

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

**NHS Smokefree helpline: 0300 123 1044**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/>

### **Tips on cutting down alcohol:**

1. Make a plan / set limits / set a budget with a fixed amount of money
2. Let friends and family know – provide support
3. Take it a day at a time - cut back a little each day
4. Make drinks smaller using smaller glasses / lower strength with more dilution
5. Stay hydrated - drink water in between
6. Take a break - have drink free days
7. Use more formal support such as AA: [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/)

### **Local Drug and Alcohol services – self referral**

- Kingston Wellbeing Service – 020 3317 7900
- Richmond Community Drugs and Alcohol service 020 3228 3020
- Wandsworth Community Drug and Alcohol Service – 0208 812 4120
- Merton - WDP - [info.merton@wdp.org.uk](mailto:info.merton@wdp.org.uk)
- Sutton - Inspire -[info@inspirepartnerships.org.uk](mailto:info@inspirepartnerships.org.uk)

For further information about DBT – [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**The Recovery College** has developed a range of assisted home learning courses designed to help develop skills that will support you during this challenging time. Website: [www.swlstg.nhs.uk/about-our-courses](http://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/about-our-courses) Email: [RCHomelearning@swlstg.nhs.uk](mailto:RCHomelearning@swlstg.nhs.uk)

The **PANDAS** foundation offers support for anyone with perinatal mental health needs: <http://www.pandasfoundation.org.uk>

**Cocoon** is a South London based support group for mothers with perinatal mental health needs: <https://cocoonfamilysupport.org/>

If you find yourself in a mental health crisis and you do not know who to turn to, South West London and St George's has a **Mental Health Support Line** for all of their clients which can advice and signpost you towards vital support. Their number is: **0800 028 8000**

**Samaritans** - call 116 123. Open 24hrs a day, 365 days a year.  
text **SHOUT** to 85258. A free confidential 24hr text support service.

If you have any feedback or need any further help with any of the information we have provided in this newsletter or wish to unsubscribe, please contact us.

**Perinatal Office** Telephone: 0203 513 6577  
Email: [ssg-tr.perinatalswlstg@nhs.net](mailto:ssg-tr.perinatalswlstg@nhs.net)

Twitter: @swlstgperinatal

## **COVID 19 Lockdown 2021**

You must not leave or be outside of your home except where necessary. You may leave the home to:

- shop for necessities, for you or a vulnerable person,
- go to work, or provide voluntary or charitable services, if you cannot reasonably do so from home,
- exercise with your household (or support bubble) or one other person, this should be limited to once per day, and you should not travel outside your local area,
- meet your support bubble or childcare bubble where necessary, but only if you are legally permitted to form one,
- seek medical assistance or avoid injury, illness or risk of harm (including domestic abuse),
- attend education or childcare - for those eligible.

### **Remember - 'Hands. Face. Space.'**

- hands – wash your hands regularly and for at least 20 seconds,
- face – wear a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet,
- space – stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings)

