

Staying motivated while in self-isolation & working from home

Sticking to a daily structure & routine is one of the most important things we can do for our mental health, not only during this unique time of social isolation due to the COVID-19 virus, but all year long. If you are especially susceptible to getting down or even depressed in the absence of regular activity & social interaction, then it is really important that you develop the motivation to stick to a daily structure & routine.



Reflect on the benefits of staying active & getting things done:

List all the benefits that come from staying active & sticking to a daily routine. It makes it easier to do something if you remind yourself of the reasons for doing it! Write them down & place them somewhere that is accessible like on the fridge, on the back of the toilet door, on the bathroom mirror. Read them each day. Here are some possible benefits for staying active:

- It helps to make you feel less bored during the day & hence enables time to pass less slowly
- It gives you a sense of pleasure & enjoyment
- It gives you a feeling of achievement & satisfaction
- To help to make you feel better about yourself as you have demonstrated you can be productive
- To help you to feel as though you are coping & managing the challenge of being isolated. This promotes self-confidence & a greater belief in your own ability to manage during hard times
- To help you generate some sense of control which is especially helpful at a time when many of us are feeling like we have no control over our lives
- By staying active, it generates greater motivation, energy & drive, which in turn promotes greater motivation to continue being active

Set reasonable goals for yourself: Don't over do it! Don't set unrealistically high expectations for yourself each day. The problem with aiming too high comes from the fact that in doing so you set yourself up to fail, which in turn tends to lower any motivation you have to stay active & stick to a daily routine. Be reasonable.

Have a balance of different activities to do each day:

Balance is everything. It can't all be about one type of activity. For the sake of simplicity, you could divide activities according to the following categories:

- Those things you have to do each day like get up in the morning, brush your teeth, have a shower, prepare breakfast, lunch & dinner, study or do school/uni work, work from home, go to bed, get a good night's sleep
- Those things you could do each day like watch TV, surf the net, clean the house, garden, exercise, talk to family & friends online, practice relaxation or meditation
- Those things that would be useful to do because they generate the benefits listed above



When planning your day don't just focus on one type of activity. Remember to be reasonable & balanced in your expectations for yourself. Incorporate a variety of activities & give yourself a better chance of sticking to your plan.



Reward yourself: When you get through the things you have to do each day or those activities you feel motivated to do because they might be less enjoyable, more difficult, tedious or monotonous, reward yourself by engaging in activities that you feel more motivated to do, ones that you find are more enjoyable, fun or gratifying. For example, once I read chapter 2 of my text book; once I return these work emails; after I have prepared dinner, I will reward myself by taking a long bath, play online games, have a glass of wine or watch TV.

Have a set place to study or work from home: It helps to *separate work from play while at home*. Many people find they are able to be more disciplined if they stick to doing work or study at their desk in their study or the dining table, rather than sitting on their bed or the couch, where they tend to relax, unwind & fall asleep. *This is due to the associations we form between locations & activities*. If you are finding it hard to stay focused on getting work done while you are sitting on the couch, it might be because you associate the couch with watching your favourite movie or TV series & not learning about a math's problem, attending a class online, doing book keeping, working on a submission for work, having a teleconference or returning work emails. By having a set place to study or do work from home you will make it easier to concentrate & be productive, which in turns helps you to stay motivated to stick to your daily routine.



Know your excuses: We all find ways of giving ourselves the permission to get out of sticking to the plan that we have set. In many ways these are our greatest enemy & serve to undermine our ability to stay focused, motivated & disciplined on the task at hand. Do any of the following sound familiar:

- I really can't be bothered
- It's not that important
- Nobody really cares what I do anyway
- I can get by without doing it
- I will do it later
- I need a break now
- I have done enough
- I will be better tomorrow



Be honest with yourself. Know your excuses. Know the way you give yourself permission to deviate from your plan. Write them down. Try defusing from these thoughts & disputing their accuracy & helpfulness.

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Minimise distractions: This is especially important when you are trying to get done those activities that you really struggle to find the motivation to do. It's one thing to know your excuses, it's also important to know those things that became distracting. Try the following:

- When you are trying to study or do work related tasks, turn your phone off. If you need your phone in order to answer calls while you work, make sure you log out of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter. Having these notifications pop up while you are trying to work can be very distracting.
- Stick to the separation between work space & relaxation space as outlined already
- Check messages or emails at a designated time e.g. once every hour
- Set up a separate work email from a personal email. This will help you to stay on task & not get distracted by personal matters
- Use headphones to block out distracting sounds
- Let people at home know you are working for the next hour & ask them not to interrupt you unless absolutely essential
- Use the technology to stop yourself from checking websites that become time wasters
<https://www.proginosko.com/leechblock/>
- Use a dedicated browser for work & study & a different one for causal & leisurely surfing of the net. The latter is often filled with open tabs, book marks & favourite pages that can be very hard to resist.

