



# Looking after yourself

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FROM TAL AND ASSURE PROGRAMS



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For many of us, pandemics are something associated with the past, before modern medical and scientific advances existed, or something confined to the world of science fiction.

The evolving COVID-19 situation and the impact it's having on our lives has taken us by surprise and it's causing some of us to experience heightened feelings of stress and anxiety. These feelings can come in waves or may be a constant part of our daily life.

During these times, it's important to look after yourself, so here are some practical self-care tips from Assure Programs to help you take control.

### HELPING YOU STAY POSITIVE DURING COVID-19

As a leader in the life insurance industry, TAL has always been focused on helping Australians through life's biggest challenges. COVID-19 has made many of us realise we live in an unpredictable world. As the situation continues, we may be feeling increased uncertainty and potentially a sense of loss.

That's why we've partnered with Assure Programs to provide resources, tools and expertise to super fund members who might need some extra support with the challenges of the current crisis.

### ABOUT TAL

TAL is a leading Australian life insurer, helping people protect what matters most in their lives for 150 years. Together with its partners, TAL provides life insurance and disability benefits to over 4 million Australians and in 2019, paid over \$2.3 billion in claims to more than 34,000 customers. TAL partners with leading superannuation funds to provide members with options to protect their future choices with insurance through super.

### ABOUT ASSURE PROGRAMS

Assure Programs is a leading mental health organisation with an extensive network of experienced psychologists and specialists. With a holistic model of counselling, wellbeing coaching and evidence-based development programs, Assure Programs helps individuals, teams and organisations across the entire mental wellbeing spectrum.

## How our minds and bodies react to uncertainty and fear

During times of change or uncertainty, it's natural to imagine the worst possible outcome. Our brains don't like uncertainty. Anything uncertain is seen as a potential threat and we often respond accordingly when our instincts steer us towards one of the following 'gut reactions'.

- **Fight:** when we're in fight mode, we're experiencing self-preservation. We often exaggerate the size of the threat and adopt a defensive or offensive mindset. In confronting the threat head on, we're prone to unreasonable behaviour, making unrealistic demands on others and/or misunderstanding information.
- **Flight:** in flight mode, we're trying to avoid the threat by escaping the negative emotions it's evoking. This can lead to behaviours like micro-managing, over-worrying, obsessive over-thinking, rushing or being unable to sit down and relax.
- **Freeze:** some people experience an intense, paralysing fear that causes them to retreat within themselves. There's often a sense of feeling spaced out, as our brain shuts down and we struggle to make rational decisions.
- **Appease:** we can move into appeasing when the threat is coming from another person. We might try to manage our discomfort by pacifying or placating the person who is the origin of the threat, bending to their whims and giving them what they want.

## The importance of self-care

When we feel healthy and strong in our bodies, our minds are more likely to reflect a healthy and strong state as well. This is especially important for those of us who have children or care for loved ones. Maintaining our health and strength leaves us more equipped to handle illness and make a speedy recovery.

## Self-care tips



**Stay connected with friends, family and colleagues.** Social connectedness is incredibly important for wellness, especially during times of uncertainty. Use technology if you're unable to catch up with loved ones face-to-face



**Work on your sleep hygiene.** Aim for seven to nine hours sleep each night and set yourself a goal to go to bed and get up at the same time each day. Make sure your sleeping environment is a comfortable temperature and dark enough to induce quality sleep.



**Practice self-compassion.** Change and uncertainty are challenging and it can take time to be tolerant and accepting of the adjustments you're being forced to make. Practice being compassionate and patient with yourself, just as you would with a child or a loved one.



**Exercise regularly.** Research tells us that exercise helps to reduce the effects of stress and depression, as well as releasing our feel-good hormones and boosting our mood. Social distancing is an important part of our approach to fighting COVID-19, but there are lots of ways you can exercise alone: use apps or YouTube tutorials to do anything from Pilates and yoga to aerobics and stretching.



**Try to control or avoid negative thoughts and feelings.** Mindfulness meditation is a skill that helps you to focus on the present, accepting all your thoughts and feelings: the unpleasant as well as the pleasant. Use guided meditation apps to get started and aim to practice for around ten minutes each day.



**Practice gratitude.** The act of being thankful releases dopamine and serotonin in our brains. Each night at bedtime, write down a few things that you're especially grateful for. This will help you focus on the good around you.



**Reach out for help.** If you're concerned or notice a significant shift in your mood, reach out to a friend, family member or an expert.

## Limit the effect

We might find ourselves in the current situation for some time to come. The following tips will help to limit the effects of the situation on your mood and help you avoid feeling fatigued:

- **Manage your exposure to news coverage.** Easy access to rolling news leaves us constantly looking for new updates, but it's important to take a break from the news and our social media feeds. Limit yourself to certain windows in the day to check for updates and leave it at that.
- **Get your information from reputable sources** and be conscious of the information you're paying attention to. Avoid believing and sharing messages that come from unnamed or unqualified sources.
- **Ground yourself with routine.** Creating routines in our daily life provides stability when we're feeling uncertain. It may be as simple as a fixed bedtime routine, making the bed each morning or doing house chores at fixed times – whatever helps you feel anchored.

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**We hope these tips help you create a greater sense of ease within yourself and for your loved ones. Your mental health is vital to your overall wellbeing and there are always more actions and behaviours you can learn to safeguard it, especially during times of uncertainty.**



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR YOUR WELLBEING



If you'd like to continue your mental health journey, Head to Health is a website provided by the Australian Department of Health that brings together a range of mental wellbeing information, programs and forums available to the wider community.

Visit [headtohealth.gov.au](https://headtohealth.gov.au)

