

# How to handle the 'new normal'

Stressed and worried about the easing of lockdown measures? We've compiled a guide to help you get through

**I**n March, we went from living our normal lives to being put on lockdown, and now we're facing another new change as restrictions are eased.

On July 4, for the first time in months, we can go to the pub or eat at a restaurant – we can even get our hair done. But for a lot of us, the thought of this is making anxiety and stress levels peak again.

'It is entirely reasonable for us all to feel unsure about what the future holds when we see the government ease the measures around the restrictions,' explains clinical director, psychologist and cofounder of wellbeing app Thrive ([thrive.uk.com](http://thrive.uk.com)) Dr Adam Huxley.

'For most of us, the previous changes had a significant impact on our way of life, our work, social life and even our relationships. Life as we knew it stopped and a new pattern emerged.

'It is hard to know just how we are going to respond to the "new normal". Some people may find making adjustments simple and they can go about their lives with minimal disruption. For others, this may mean significant life changes and with it a sense of anxiety about the future and their safety in it.

'For some, excessive worry may give rise to anxiety disorders and panic attacks. You may feel uncertain about going back out, seeing familiar people or even going back to work.'

Whether it's the fear of catching coronavirus or the worry about

socialising and making plans when we've all been so used to being in our homes, you're not alone.

We've talked to the experts to give you some tips on making this next phase as easy as possible...



Energy trauma expert Antonia

## FOLLOW EXPERT ADVICE

With so many opinions on what to do and how to do it, we can become overwhelmed with information. All we can do is

follow government advice when it comes to social distancing, how many households can visit each other and where and how to wear face masks.

## MAKE SMALL ADJUSTMENTS FIRST

'Returning to life as it was may not be possible,' explains Dr Huxley.

'It might be helpful to think of incremental small changes over a period of time.'

'You were no doubt extremely busy prior to lockdown, then slowed right down,' adds energy trauma expert Antonia Harman ([divineempowerment.co.uk](http://divineempowerment.co.uk)). 'Maybe you don't ever want to be that busy again, and that is OK. A slower pace of life may suit you better, but you might have been too busy and stressed to notice this before.'

'Be selective about plans where you can, choose what you want to do. You don't have to do it all,' says Antonia.

Dr Huxley agrees and advises a slow approach. 'What do you need to prioritise first? Write it down so you don't feel overwhelmed by it all. Don't try to do too much, too soon,' he says.

## FACE UP TO UNCERTAINTY

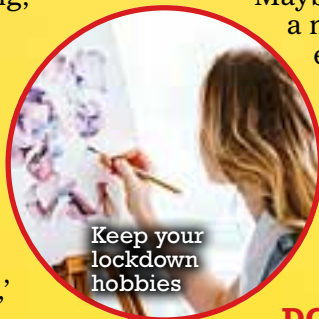
'Life may change for all of us for the foreseeable future. Accepting

that things will be different will make the transition easier,' says Dr Huxley. 'Looking after your physical and mental wellbeing will help you cope with the changes. Developing resilience will allow you to manage future challenges in a positive way.'

## SEE THIS CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY

'It might help to view the current situation as an opportunity for change. Think about all the changes you wanted to make in your life that you weren't able to achieve previously,' suggests Dr Huxley.

'Maybe you wanted to try a new career, take more exercise, focus more on your wellbeing. This could be an opportunity to reinvent yourself or parts of your life you were not completely happy with before.'



Keep your lockdown hobbies

## DON'T STOP YOUR LOCKDOWN HOBBIES

'Many people have picked up some new hobbies during lockdown,' says neurological therapist Dr Elizabeth Nightingale. 'But rather than letting these fall by the wayside when life begins to return to normality, it's beneficial to find time in your life for them post-lockdown.'

'Studies have shown activities that may help maintain your mental wellbeing are those that are "cognitively stimulating" – including the likes of brain teasers and educational activities, as well as creative hobbies like baking, art, drama, dancing and music. In fact, music and art

therapies can help to alleviate the symptoms of depression, anxiety, trauma and low self-esteem in individuals with mental health disorders.'

## MANAGE THE STRESS

'You need to focus on the positive, not the negative,' Antonia explains. 'Celebrate the small things. You may need to adopt a level of emotional discipline. If you find yourself stressing, change your thoughts, literally interrupt yourself with another activity. Jumping jacks, a cat video, anything to get you off the anxiety hamster wheel. Remember to breathe. The technique opens up your lungs, anxiety closes them. You will feel better when you can breathe.'



Families have gone through months of separation



Use this time to focus on fitness and wellbeing

## And breathe...



If waves of panic or anxiety come over you at any time, whether that be at home, in a shop queue or on the bus, try Antonia's simple breathing technique.

- 1) Exhale completely, making a whooshing sound.
- 2) Close your mouth and inhale through your nose for 4 seconds.
- 3) Hold your breath for 7 seconds.
- 4) Exhale for 8 seconds making a whooshing sound.

Don't worry if the seconds are not precise. Do this with your eyes open or shut.