

Kia Kaha: Stay strong stay safe

Top tips to maintaining wellness for healthcare professionals

By PreKure.com #preventioniscure

Your personal wellbeing is really important. The public of New Zealand needs YOU.

Wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning effectively. It's critical right now that we set a foundation on which our mental health and wellbeing can rest solidly. How do we do that? Prepare like you're heading into race day, or your wedding day, or however you need to construct this in your head. You want to be at your best to deal with this pandemic.

Being prepared and sustaining your whole health comes via a few key steps: prioritising sleep; keeping up the exercise; good nutrition and staying socially connected (safely). These things are critical to setting that good foundation, to helping you stay well and to managing your stress and anxiety more readily.

Sleep

- We prioritise sleep, because besides being fundamental to your immune system functioning, it's critical to your mental health and wellbeing. When we get stressed out, our sleep tends to get disrupted.
- Prioritise your sleep and your sleep hygiene as much as possible. This means no blue lights before bed because it messes with your sleep cycles. It reduces the amount of restorative deep sleep that you get and that is critical for your immune system and for managing your wellbeing and your health – both physical and mental.
- **Reading about COVID-19 before bed is not doing you any favours. Let's be proactive.**
- Consider a short relaxing routine before sleep, e.g. breathing exercises, meditation, visualisation.
- Within your different shift cycles, wake up and go to bed at the same time each set of shifts.
- Build that foundation. Sleep is crucial.



Exercise

- Exercise is critical. Depending on the levels of restriction that are in place, you may need to get creative.
- Download some exercise apps, e.g. yoga, core strength.
- Prioritise daily exercise.
- Take green time breaks in the hospital grounds (with appropriate social distancing) if and when appropriate. Humans require sunlight to produce vitamin D, which in turn supports bone health, blood cells and, most importantly, immunity.

Eat really well

- Enjoy nutritious foods every day that are whole and unprocessed.
 - Choose vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, seafood, poultry, dairy, nuts, seeds, and legumes as tolerated.
 - Favour traditional oils, fats and spreads over refined and processed versions.
 - Keep total sugar, especially added sugar, to a minimum in all foods and drinks.
- Make the majority of your food purchases ones that don't come in packages; if you must buy packaged foods, choose items with less than 5 ingredients.
- Prevention of skin breakdown due to wearing face masks can be assisted by consuming nutritious food while avoiding processed food.

When on shift, eat *really, really* well

- You may have to wear full masks and gowns which will make snacking difficult.
- Ensure that when you do get the opportunity to eat, you prioritise foods that will nourish and sustain you for longer periods of time. This means healthy fats and proteins, not crappy processed foods. Think nuts, cheese, boiled eggs, chicken drumsticks, fruit.

Stay socially connected and physically distant

- Friends are medicine. They are good for our mental health and wellbeing. They're good for our brain health. The reality is that we don't realise how much actual socialising we're doing until we're simply not allowed. We take it all for granted until it's taken away.



How do we get our socialising fix when we are in lockdown or when we're being told to stay away from other people and work at home wherever possible? Or when we are working longer than usual shifts?

- Skype calls work really well. Wherever possible, maintain that face-to-face contact – so you can see their face and they can see yours – because it adds to the experience. Studies done in terms of the impacts on brain health and wellbeing, and of social connection and wellbeing, say that it's not the same to talk on the phone as it is to have that face-to-face contact.
- During your breaks, use your computers, use your phones, get on there and connect with others.
- Start a press-up challenge amongst pals. Find ways to connect and to reconnect with other people.
- Make sure we're checking in online, virtually, with our loved ones, with our family who are vulnerable and at risk, whom we can't see in person.
- Pandemic conditions can create feelings of frustration, often due to loss of routine and ongoing uncertainty. Breathe, self-check and talk to someone if this is having a negative effect on yourself or others. These feelings are normal, however they must be acknowledged and managed effectively to ensure a team with the same forward mental model.



What to do if you find yourself in those moments of overwhelm, when you catch yourself in one of those worry cycles or when you're stressed or you're feeling down?

Critically, what PreKure recommend is, know your warning signs. Know your red flags. It might sound a bit silly, but often we find ourselves completely overwhelmed by something before we realised we were even stressed about it. How we think impacts on how we feel. How we feel impacts on what we do about those feelings and what we do impacts on how we feel and on our sensations. Really start to tune into the types of your first signs and symptoms. You might notice a tenseness in your jaw. I start to notice that I'm opening my mouth. I'm doing these things because I'm tense. I notice that my shoulders hitch up around my ears. Those are first triggers. I've really taught myself to tune into them because the issue is, it's not so much with the sensation, the tension, itself but it's in how much that tension amplifies that stress cycle.

Stress amplifies our thoughts. It amplifies our worries. It amplifies the stress that we feel and it feeds into others. It increases our heart rate and our breath starts to become shallow. If you can manage to control your physical sensations of stress – the tension in your shoulders or your heart rate – by breathing deeply, you can truly kick yourself out of that cycle or slow it down. De-escalate that cycle of stress in those initial phases.

- Every time you go to the Pyxis, or nursing station – take a deep breath and check in with yourself. Are you OK?
- I'm slowing my breathing down, I'm relaxing myself. I'm using my stomach breathing, I'm checking in – “How am I feeling? How am I coping?” Okay. I'm giving myself that minute or two of just peace.
- Be aware that our strong feelings and strong emotions such as worry or fear are a bit like a wave. We know they can feel really strong, but we also know it can be hard to remember in the moment that those feelings do subside. Remember to breathe and know that it's okay to have these feelings. The key is to accept that they're there and that you know that they will pass. Worry and stress are a perfectly normal response to uncertainty.
- Ensure you are practicing self-compassion and self-care daily.
- Talk to yourself as you would talk to a good friend. Really, this is a chance to embrace a different way of being with yourself. Believing that you should be able to truck on and that there shouldn't be this level of tension and stress right now – it's simply not reasonable.
- Remember, you're not alone in your feelings and you are way more resilient than you think. You will get through this. We will get through this. We just need to be together. We need to look after each other and we need to look after ourselves.
- If you are noticing that you're struggling with negative thoughts and feelings, or that you're feeling in distress, then it's time to check in with someone about how you're feeling. Talk to your work colleagues.

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