

Managing your re-entry to life

How to move forward with balance, ease and calm in a post-pandemic world.

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As restrictions lift, borders reopen and we learn to live with Covid-19, we are still faced with a great deal of uncertainty. Many of us are returning to the workplace or back on campus to study, and there is a level of anxiety around what this will look like. What impact will it have on our health and wellbeing?

Some of us are hesitant to return to our old pace of life, while others can't wait to resurrect a busy work or study schedule and vibrant social calendar. Many people are torn between the two. Whichever category you fall into, it's important to consider that we are still living in uncharted territory.

There are many steps you can take to support your wellbeing while lessening the

impact on your physical and mental health. You can prepare yourself for further change and discomfort by conserving some of your energy and supporting yourself holistically.

If you take things slowly, focus on the areas of your life that generate positive emotions and recognise when you need more support, you can continue to move forward in a Covid-19 world.

A shared experience

A significant number of people have experienced negative emotions over the past two years. Whether due to restrictions and rolling lockdowns, anxiety over health conditions or concern for loved ones, many people have experienced fear or suffered some degree of loss. Knowing that more



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Practising acceptance means letting go of the things you can't control. There is a level of relief in letting go and accepting the current flow of life.

change and discomfort lies ahead may provoke further anxiety.

There can be comfort in knowing you are not alone in feeling this way. It is a normal and appropriate response to feel nervous, stressed or anxious when experiencing uncertainty and unprecedented change.

I have personally experienced a range of emotions since Covid-19 reached Australian shores. I have swung from feeling fearful and anxious about catching the virus and hoping desperately for an effective vaccine, to feeling equally fearful and anxious about getting vaccinated.

Honour your emotions

It's important to check in with yourself regularly and honour your emotions and what they are telling you. Pushing through or throwing yourself in the deep end is not always the best way forward. Regularly ask yourself, "What do I need right now?"

When feeling overwhelmed with negative emotions or unable to move forward, it can be helpful to tap into your inner guidance through meditation. This is a tool I rely on when making important decisions. When the outside world is chaotic and confusing, I can find stillness and comfort by retreating within. I then feel safe in the knowledge that my inner wisdom has guided me.

This is how it is

Practising acceptance means letting go of the things you can't control. There is a level of relief in letting go and accepting the

current flow of life. Fighting against it and wishing things were different creates more negative emotions that can lead to stress. Accept that this is how things are right now while allowing yourself to acknowledge that it's hard. And some days, it's incredibly hard.

Consider how you can make the current situation work best for you and what support you need to achieve this.

Find balance

Restrictions over the past two years have meant less time spent in busy workplaces or crowded, stimulating environments. Although living with restrictions was difficult, many people welcomed the slower pace of life.

More introverted personalities or those living with social anxiety may find it tempting to continue to stay home and restrict social activity. However, research demonstrates that positive social support can reduce the risk of mental illness and provide a protective affect against stress. Stress triggers the fight-or-flight instinct in your body, resulting in increased cortisol (stress hormone) levels. Long-term high cortisol levels can negatively impact immune function, blood pressure and sleep quality. It's therefore important to find a healthy balance between solitude and social connection.

Consider staying away from the people and events that leave you feeling depleted. Instead, focus on social plans that are meaningful to you and spending time with people who are positive and supportive.

It's important to establish what you are, and are not, comfortable with and communicate this to others.

Breathe through it

In times of uncertainty, belly breathing is a quick and simple tool for reducing anxiety, decreasing heart rate and calming the nervous system. Sometimes you might be holding your breath without realising it and other times taking shallow breaths.

If you feel yourself getting anxious, stop and focus on your breath for a few minutes. Breathe deeply and allow your lower abdomen to expand during each inhalation and relax during each exhalation. Breathing exercises can be done anywhere and at any time – in the car on the way to work or uni, on public transport or in a crowded meeting room or lecture theatre.

Nourish your mind and body

Other ways to lessen the effects of stress include nourishing your body with a wholefoods diet and engaging in regular exercise and mindful practices that calm the nervous system, such as yoga and meditation. These strategies help to reduce anxiety while improving sleep quality and wellbeing. Roughly 20-30 minutes of daily sunlight exposure and adequate rest is also recommended.

A diet that is high in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants and low in inflammatory, processed food supports the immune and nervous systems. The easiest way to get beneficial nutrients through the diet is to



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eat high levels of plant food and ensure your diet also contains healthy fats and adequate protein for healthy neurotransmitter synthesis. Protein can be obtained from both plant and animal sources. When eating red meat, choose high-quality, lean, grass-fed options. Healthy fats can be obtained from a Mediterranean style of eating, which may include olive oil, raw nuts and seeds. Nuts and seeds are also good sources of omega-3 fatty acids, along with oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines.

Mindfulness and self-compassion are effective tools for building emotional resilience. Mindfulness teaches you to cultivate non-judgemental awareness of the present moment. Learning to be more present can assist in reducing anxiety about

future negative events that may or may not take place. Through practising self-compassion, you are better equipped to recognise your emotional distress and go easy on yourself when you are struggling.

Get the right support

If your negative emotions are overwhelming and you're struggling to cope, it's important to reach out for professional support. Most workplaces and universities offer a free Telehealth service that connects you to a registered psychologist. Natural health practitioners can assist with stress relief, immune support and improving the quality of your sleep.

Establish what support you need right now while appreciating that what works

for others may not work for you. This is a time for flexibility, compassion and understanding, both towards yourself and the people around you.

Lastly, consider how far you have come in the past few years – the skills you have learned and the resilience you have built. Know that you can draw on this strength to navigate the uncertainty that lies ahead. Set boundaries, practise self-care and support yourself along the way. 🍷

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