

## COVID-19: Eating Disorder Experiences

05/05/2020

The current Coronavirus situation is unprecedented. It is causing a huge change in society, creating uncertainty, anxiety, and disruption to normal lives and normal routines. For people with an eating disorder, this disruption may bring about extra challenges that may be difficult to deal with on top of everything else. Quite often, living with an eating disorder already brings fear and panic, and the current situation has the potential to intensify this.

The CAPS Eating Disorder collective advocacy group, Seen But Not Heard, have put together some information on their experience of living in these extraordinary times, and addressed some concerns that people living with an eating disorder may have.

- Difficulties regarding reduced movement and exercise

Responses from group members:

*“Lower step count than normal - constantly monitoring my fit bit to see how many steps it says and feeling disappointed when the number is a lot lower than I would like.”*

*“Sitting around all day and only being able to get out the house once a day for minimal exercise, otherwise I’m finding I’m spending more time on the sofa than I normally would. Makes me feel lazy and sluggish.”*

*“Access to exercise = definitely for me, not having access to gyms would have been an issue when I was experiencing my ED, also not having the ability to ‘exercise in secret’ would have been one of my nightmares.”*

*“Sitting around means more focus on negative thoughts.”*

**‘Doing nothing’ – this could potentially trigger feelings of being ‘lazy’. The reality is that no matter what the situation there are NO ‘shoulds’ about what you do or do not do. It is perfectly ok to do nothing, to be ‘lazy’, to pause, to allow your body and mind to rest.**

- **Difficulties around food and routines**

**Responses from group members:**

*“Eating the same/if not more but doing a lot less physical activity. Trying to remember my body still needs food and nourishment even if I am just sitting still all day. There’s still a minimum number of calories and energy that my body requires simply just to live.”*

*“Eating because of boredom - living with my parents and they keep offering me food even if I don’t really want it e.g. a chocolate biscuit with my coffee.”*

*“Eating routine and observation - being around family (who you live with) constantly, finding it hard to hide eating or hide if not eating.”*

*“Not having access to all the foods I ate before (safe foods) having to compromise based on what foods I can get at the shop and which foods are out of stock.”*

**Regular food – Having a routine is important and can be a big help during these uncertain times. Many people have said that a routine was a vital practical aspect of trying to recover from an ED:**

**Routine around eating = routine in digestive system = regular physical effects = more regular mood / clearer thoughts and feelings.**

**Also, it is not only someone with an ED who would benefit from having a routine and regular eating during these times – it is helpful for everyone! There are websites and advice online about looking after your mental health during this time, which will be posted below this document.**

- **Difficulties regarding reduced contact/isolation**

**Responses from group members:**

*“Access to help - not having physical contact with psychiatrists, dieticians, other support - having to resort to online therapy could be challenging/less helpful.”*

*“Loneliness - isolation from people/society makes things more difficult for all of us, mental health is bound to suffer, and this is made extra hard when you have an eating disorder.”*

*“Social support - not being able to do some of the things that people will do to keep mental health stable - hobbies, meeting up with friends etc.”*

**Beat, the UK’s eating disorder charity have a Helpline for those with an eating disorder, and family and friends who may be affected. During this pandemic they have put extra provisions in place, such as an online group and resources with guidance from their eating disorder clinicians. More information can be found:**

**<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/coronavirus>**

## Some final words from the Seen But Not Heard group

*Communicate with friends - speaking to people on FaceTime or calling them can help a lot if you're feeling down. Don't underestimate how helpful a chat with friends can be, even if they don't have an eating disorder. Especially if you're struggling - try and reach out to friends. It can make you feel less alone."*

*"I think learning a new hobby and using your time to find something you really take joy in is great, but also not putting pressure on yourself to do anything particularly productive. A new hobby could just be an online game that you have never played before or listening to new music. "*

*"Positives = on the less gloomy side of things, perhaps a large change like this may allow people to focus on something else and it might be a time to focus on the things we have that we take for granted in everyday life."*

*"Watching how other people are dealing with the new restrictions has been helping me keep things in perspective. Those around me are still eating regularly, not over-exercising and nothing bad has happened. Resting, and staying home is okay."*

## Some websites and resources that may be helpful:

### **Mental Health Foundation**

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

### **The Samaritans**

<https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>

### **BEAT**

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/coronavirus>

## **Young Minds**

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-an-eating-disorder-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

## **Podcasts:**

Gurls Talk by Adwoa Aboah; episode 36 Adwoa talks to Dr. Ciara Dockery about how we can all thrive in isolation

The Daily Pep! with Meg Kissack

The Daily Shine

Mentally Yours: Coronavirus; episode Eating Disorders and Coronavirus

**For more information on the CAPS Eating Disorder collective advocacy project, Seen But Not Heard, please contact Niamh Allen: [niamh@capsadvocacy.org](mailto:niamh@capsadvocacy.org)**

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