

Get up and atom: a guide to staying motivated during COVID-19!

“How can I get motivation to remain productive during this lockdown?”

“I find I feel a bit lazy/sluggish at home, so tips on how to overcome this (besides exercise, as I do that already) would be useful.”

Boosting your energy and finding motivation is especially hard during these unusual times. There are many mood changing factors that can drain energy levels. In addition to social distancing and self-isolation, we lost our normal routine, and our usual fun activities ceased. We also deal with worries about our own health and the health of those we love, and the uncertainty of our future further augment anxiety. This is a situation we have no prior experience with, and our regular coping mechanisms are also curtailed. Therefore, staying productive will be a challenge. On top of this, many trainees will have limited tasks that can be done away from their workplace (labs, clinics).

Take a moment to acknowledge these difficulties and your reaction to them. It is entirely normal to have a range of emotions. Moreover, these feelings will fluctuate and evolve over time.

Anxiety and stress will drain your energy, so to feel better you will have to actively develop ways to reduce these. Below are a few tips on how to overcome some of these difficulties. If you have ongoing issues that affect your mental health, make sure to seek professional help. For more

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advice on coping please check out <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19>.

One huge factor affecting your energy levels is the **quality and quantity of your sleep**. Lack of a regular routine and anxiety are two big factors that adversely affect your sleep quality. Interestingly, new emerging data suggest that many people have more vivid dreams during the lockdown, suggesting, among other, that our anxiety is in high gear. Read more on this here:

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2242379-how-coronavirus-is-affecting-your-dreams-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

Not all changes are bad: some people have more time to sleep and wake up naturally rather than with an alarm. Striving to maintain a healthy sleep pattern is probably one of the most important advice. You can find some great tips on this on the Mayo Clinic's website:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379>



Another important step towards regaining your energy is establishing a new **daily routine**. Try to get up at the same time every day. Have a plan for each day. Separate work hours from non-work activities. Make sure to eat healthy and exercise regularly. Don't forget about the importance of daylight (sunshine) for your health. Go outside for a walk/run/bike as much as possible.

Maintain your **social interactions** any way possible. Talk to your friends and family regularly. Reach out to old friends with whom you lost contact with. Keep contact with your supervisor and work colleagues. Participate in online social activities. These are key for boosting your mood and energy.

Get started with work: the lockdown will augment tendencies to procrastinate. More than ever, you will likely have to force yourself to get started with your work. One of the big reasons for procrastination is uncertainty about how to do a task. Understand details of your task. Seek advice.

Start small. Remember, motivation will likely increase when you experience progress, so get started with your task.

*To ensure progress, you will also need to **reduce distractions**. The lockdown will make it harder to focus. Make a conscious effort to avoid distractions. The truth about multitasking is that it does not work for most people. So, when you work, silence your phone and ask people not to distract you. Assign specific times for activities like email and social media. There are a variety of online tools you can use to track your activities, including the time you spend browsing the web. Try using habit tracker apps. These can give you a hint on where to start to reduce distractions. Check out the [Pomodoro Timer!](#)*



***Dedicated time for tasks:** you can increase your productivity by assigning specific times to specific tasks. This can be more effective than making a general to-do list. You can also ask help from people you trust to motivate you and provide accountability. Study groups can provide extra motivation.*

*Be creative in finding new **fun activities**. Separate work from leisure. During the lockdown we have lost much of our fun and stress relieving activities. You will find that replacing these with new ones can boost your energy levels.*

*Dealing with a **range of emotions** can quickly drain one's energy. Although it is important to acknowledge your emotions, try not to dwell on them. Work on developing and maintaining a **positive attitude**. This can be hard when things seem bleak, and the future is uncertain. However, there are many techniques that will help you find the silver lining. Make sure you are not over focusing on negative thoughts. Try out meditation or mindfulness exercises. If news makes you nervous, reduce your exposure.*



Be aware of goals and celebrate progress. Remind yourself of what you want to achieve. Take note of progress, even if it is small. When you feel down, seek out social interactions, as these will boost your mood. Be kind to yourself and acknowledge the difficult situation you are in.

*Maintaining your **sense of humor** is a good mood booster. A smile or laugh has healing powers. Check out the many benefits of laughter on the Mayo Clinic site:*

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>

Finally, don't lose hope. This situation will pass, and much better days are ahead. 😊