



Maintaining mental wellbeing in isolation

This advice has been prepared by our new Chief Advisor Human Factors Matt Harris, and is targeted primarily at aircrew. For the rest of us it serves as a good reminder of what we can do to look after ourselves and our wellbeing if we find ourselves in isolation in the future – whether it is because of a COVID-19 resurgence, or working in a remote or isolated setting.

The importance of mental health and wellbeing on career success and overall life satisfaction is being increasingly recognised. Maintaining mental health and wellbeing improves both individual and organisational outcomes. Given the current challenging global circumstances, aviation mental health issues are an ongoing area of concern.

Flight and cabin crew typically face long working hours and frequent periods away from home, but these challenges have been compounded by additional isolation requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spending days with limited social contact, resources and stimulation can be detrimental to a crew member's mental health and they are potentially more at risk of developing mental health issues such as depression or anxiety.

While a diagnosis of a mental health issue is a serious health consideration, it should not mean the end of your aviation career. It's important to know that you're not alone and that there is support and information available.

Given these new challenges, there are strategies and preventative measures you can employ to help self-manage and enhance wellbeing.

Maintain a routine

Identifying what you can control during times of isolation, setting goals and tracking progress can provide you with a continued sense of purpose. Establishing and sticking to a healthy sleep routine can simultaneously help reduce the amount of stress you experience while also preparing you to better manage your stress the next day. Schedule time to be active both

physically and mentally by finding new ways to exercise and engage your brain. Plan what and when you're going to eat and connect with your fellow crew. Organise regular video/phone calls with family and friends and then set aside time to intentionally unplug from technology.

Maintain mental and physical fitness in isolation

Physical health has a strong impact on our mental wellbeing. Exercise can help reduce anxiety, depression, and negative mood and improve self-esteem and cognitive function. When space is limited exercise can be difficult but taking inspiration from our peers in maritime there are ways to exercise and stretch even in confined spaces; [Training on Board - Wall Workout](#). Exercising our brain as well as our body is just as important for mental health and wellbeing. We can do this by challenging our mind with puzzles, crosswords, Sudoku, and so on, or by learning something new, such as a new language.

Keep up hobbies and interests

Aim to have some activities to do alone or with some of the crew, playing games, solving puzzles, making things, reading or drawing, and plan ahead so you can take the materials you need away with you. Continuing to engage in hobbies and interests is important, even if it's not the same as at home, as the sense of achievement gained can boost self-esteem and general wellbeing. If your hobbies are difficult to take with you, look forward to picking them up again on your return, and try something new in the meantime.

Remember you're not alone

A natural consequence of being away from family for long periods of time is that of feeling lonely. Remember that if you're feeling low and alone, you are neither the first nor the only one to feel this way. Humans are social beings and staying connected is important. It lifts our spirits and keeps us going. Technology can help us reach out to friends and family through phone/video calls or social media but even writing notes or letters to post or email can help you feel connected. Connecting with your fellow crew is equally as important and the conversations don't need to be about mental health or personal experiences if you don't want to. Positive conversations about things outside of work, common interests or things important to you can help everyone have the best possible experience in the circumstances.

Check in with yourself and your colleagues

We often don't take the time to reflect on how we feel, especially during busy or stressful

periods. During briefings, take time to discuss mental health, what works for you might not work for others, talking things through as a team might help crew members develop their own coping strategies. Again, our maritime peers can assist with providing some talking points based on what the science says about helping [Boost Your Wellbeing](#). It's also important that operators ensure their crew have the necessary information and strategies to help alleviate the effects of stress that can lead to mental health issues. Finally, operating since 2015, the [Peer Assistance Network \(PAN\)](#) has been providing guidance and counselling to hundreds of aviation professionals, from trainees to senior airline captains. To help improve personal wellbeing Flight Safety Foundation have produced [An Aviation Professionals Guide to Wellbeing](#).

In times like these, with no definitive time frame for when these COVID-19 restrictions will ease, it's in the crew's best interest to put these types of strategies into practice. Supporting your own and others' mental and physical health and wellbeing is vital for getting through these challenges safely.

