

# Life After Lockdown

FIRST STEPS ED  
REGISTERED CHARITY 1185092  
MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY, SPECIALISING IN EATING DISORDERS



Our services have been developed alongside NHS eating disorders services and our staff and volunteers receive ongoing training and supervision inline with NICE and NHS England guidance and service standards.





## INTRODUCTION



# Taking those First Steps

We will all be experiencing a number of emotions regarding the pandemic at the moment, especially with the government's latest roadmap out of lockdown and the lifting of restrictions. Whilst many of us will be excited with our new freedoms, others will have a new underlying anxiety around this return to 'normality'.

This guide has been designed as a general tool to help you get through the next couple of months, offering advice and support with certain areas of our day-to-day lives. If you need professional support or guidance for your mental health please visit our website and **make a referral**.



You (or a loved one) don't have to suffer in silence. Full recovery from mental health issues and eating disorders is possible. It might be hard not to compare yourself to other people in recovery, but try not to, as each journey is different.

Here at First Steps ED, we aim to empower you to be in control of your recovery through one-to-one professional and group support and inclusion in positive activities. To make a referral visit our website, or you speak to our team today via the [our contact page](#)

# Contents

2	Introduction	10	LONELINESS AFTER LOCKDOWN
3	Contents	11	SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE
4	<b>FOOD AND MOOD</b>	12	Making plans
5	Tips for food and mood	13	Conclusion
6	Feeling My Best (Activity)	14	Service Breakdown
7	<b>SOCIAL STRESS AND ANXIETY</b>	15	Resources
8	Social distress to social success!	16	Contact Us
9	Handling Disappointment		







# Food and Mood

After months of restrictions, lockdowns and adapting to a new way of living and working, we are now approaching the end of a very unusual year.

There is more change and uncertainty to come and this can be difficult, especially for those who are struggling with their mental health, body image or relationship with food. Whether you are worried about seeing old friends and family, or feeling the pressure from online to engage in diet-related behaviour, please read through this guide and remind yourself that it has been a tough year.

## Let's end all restrictions

Many 'health' companies and social media accounts will be using the easing of restrictions as an opportunity to encourage you to implement restrictions with your food choices to get you 'looking your best'.

After living with social restrictions and the effects it has had on our mental health, food restrictions can have the same negative impact. Let's free ourselves from **all restrictions** and look at how we can achieve a more balanced diet and nourish our bodies. Our food and mood are linked and impact each other. The next couple pages will offer some advice, support and a short activity on to you can look after your mind and body:





## Our top six tips for improving food and mood



- 1 Don't cut out any food groups** - When we restrict certain foods in our diet or cut out whole food groups it can cause us to crave those foods even more. Each food group has an essential role to play in helping our body function, so it's important to include them all.
- 2 Eat regularly** - If your blood sugar level drops it can make you feel tired and irritable. Eating regularly will keep your sugar levels steady. Try eating food that releases energy slowly like nuts, seeds, oats and wholegrains (Protein & Carbohydrates)
- 3 Fats for brain function** - Our brain needs fatty oils (such as omega 3 and 6) to keep it working well. Try to include the right type of fats in your diet such as: Oily Fish, Chicken, Avocados, Olive Oil, Sunflower/Pumpkin Seeds, Milk, Yoghurt & Cheese, Eggs, Walnuts & Almonds.
- 4 Drink more water** - If you're not hydrated enough, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. Water is great but you can also include herbal teas and diluted fruit juice to help you increase the amount you are drinking.
- 5 Eat a rainbow of fruit and veg** - Fruit and Vegetables include a lot of the minerals, vitamins, and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy. Eating a rainbow of colours each day means you'll get a good variety of nutrients.
- 6 Cut down on Caffeine** - Having too much caffeine can make you feel anxious and disturb your sleep if having it late in the day. You can also experience withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly. Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea and energy drinks. Cutting down slowly can start to improve your mood.





Restaurants and food outlets have been closed for quite some time and the thought of eating in social situations with friends may be causing you to worry. Just know that it is ok to feel this way and transitioning back to some 'normality' is going to take time. This page focuses on some concerns which may have come from activity online, alongside an activity that we hope will help you start feeling your best and feel more positive about upcoming changes.

### Social Media Pressures

As expected, social media posts and influencers are causing many of us to feel pressured to 'look our best' post-lockdown and to engage in diet related behaviours. Putting pressure on yourself after a tough year is the last thing you need. We've already had to handle living through a pandemic. But let's look at this differently, it can be easy for us to want to look our best on the outside but feeling good starts from the inside.

### 'Feeling My Best' (An Activity!)

Use the diagram below, or draw your own bubbles, and fill them with some of the things you enjoy which make you feel your best. Think about those activities that promote wellness, and something which help relieves any stress or anxiety. Here is some ideas from the team; gentle yoga and stretching, talking to family & friends, listening to your favourite playlist and having a little dance.



**Quick Tip** - Unfollow accounts that make you feel negative about your body or make you compare your life/body to theirs. There are lots of mind and body positive accounts to follow and seeing more of these posts on your feed will help you to think and feel more positive. The First Steps ED Instagram account is a great space and platform for you to engage with.



# Social Stress and Anxiety

Social anxiety is incredibly common and something which many of us struggle with. During the pandemic the tides had changed, and the nature of the lockdown restrictions on socialising gave those with social anxiety some light relief, allowing us to avoid social situations without guilt or endless excuses – much like our very own get-out-of-jail-free card!



Fast forward to now, whilst it's great that we're being given more freedom and the chance to reunite with loved ones, it can be a very anxiety-provoking time. If you are struggling at the moment, know that it is normal to be fearful of losing the guidelines we have become so reliant on (that get-out-of-jail-free-card is about to expire!)

On the other hand, so many people felt isolated during lockdown. The social restrictions may have stripped us from our usual hobbies and activities that involved socialising on a regular basis and there is a quiet excitement to get back to our pre-lockdown routine. However, with this comes its own anxiety and the worry or fear of being left out or forgotten once restrictions begin to lift and we see others returning to normal ([See 'Handling Disappointment'](#)).

There are also those of us sitting in the middle who don't want to miss out on any new social opportunity, but also don't feel comfortable joining in just yet.

Whatever you're feeling, you are not alone and it's important to understand that emerging from lockdown is something we must all do at our own pace, resisting pressure from those around us as much as possible.



## Social distress to social success!

The prospect of the world opening up again is scary, and this is new for us all. We don't yet know how it will feel to regain some freedoms and start socialising again and it's likely to be very strange at first but like anything else, hopefully get better in time as we adapt.

Before you get started, here are a few tips to follow as we re-adjust in a post-lockdown world;

1. **Remember it is not a race**, you don't have to behave any differently when restrictions lift just because the guidance has changed. **If you're not ready, take your time.**
2. **Try not to give in to pressure** – whether you feel it from others or put it upon yourself.
3. **Try writing down your fears and concerns** and assess if you can challenge them or invite help from others who support you. Maybe consider using your list of anxieties to help others around you understand the reluctances you have.
4. **Lastly, remind yourself that the novelty will wear off and you will adjust to this new 'normal'.**

On the next page we have put together more guidance on managing social activities after lockdown.





Remember we are all adjusting to the changes and nobody is right or wrong in this situation. It is important to move at your own pace and do not do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or anxious. It is also important to understand that other people may feel differently, so try not to make others feel uncomfortable when discussing forthcoming plans.

- Start by keeping social engagements short in duration, progressing to longer periods of time when you feel more comfortable.
- If arranging to meet-up physically, why not initially suggest outdoor activities, such as a walk, as a way to reduce risk and gradually increase social confidence.
- If you would prefer to wait until you have been vaccinated, politely point this out to family and friends and suggest postponing until you can enjoy it properly.
- When you are feeling a little anxious, try to engage breathing techniques, or another coping mechanism, to help you calm down.
- Maintaining social distancing will help to both follow current safety guidelines and make you feel safer, and if you have to go indoors remember you should wear a face covering (where necessary) to protect yourself and others.
- It's OK to suggest virtual catch-ups while the restrictions are still being lifted and you feel safer remaining at home.

## Handling Disappointment

We are all optimistic about the government's roadmap and plan out of lockdown, but it is always good to be prepared for any delays or challenges which we may observe along the way. The pandemic has so far been uncertain and that is unlikely to change over the next few months. When you make plans, accept that these may change in line with ever-changing government guidelines.

Should the governments roadmap all go to plan, there are other possible challenges you could face when you start to socialise. When you decide you're ready to start making plans, remember that we are all human and need to adjust in our own time.

Try not to be disappointed if someone says no to an invite. This could be for a number of reasons such as anxieties surrounding coronavirus and social distancing, or they could be busy with their work or home life. Be patient and understanding and, if you're disappointed, try not to take it too personally.



# Loneliness after lockdown

For many of us, lockdown has provided an opportunity to spend more time with loved ones and the prospect of that ending can be both sad and worrying. We might have children returning to school and university, partners or parents going back to work or perhaps it's us that must change routine and feel anxious at the thought of it. A year is a long time to adapt to a new way of living and growing comfortable with 'lockdown life' is both common and understandable.

If you're struggling with the idea of being alone more as restrictions lift, there are steps you can take to combat this:

- Find a new purpose or meaning in your life by researching additional hobbies or skills you can gain. You may feel better if engaging in positive distractions.
- Plan enjoyable activities for the weekends or evenings to give you all something to look forward to.
- If you have more time on your hands, why not reconnect with friends and family either face to face as restrictions lift or via video calls.
- Meet new people by looking up community groups in your area who either meet virtually or in-person as lockdown eases. Finding a new social circle or like-minded group can boost your confidence and create new friendships.
- Volunteering your time can be incredibly rewarding and makes a huge difference to many charities and non-profit organisations. It can lead to meeting new people, gaining new skills and is a beneficial use of your time. You can volunteer remotely or in-person as the pandemic eases.







If you have a relative or friend who is struggling with their mental health at the moment, it is important for them to seek some support or treatment, but know that this is only one side of their journey to recovery and that you can play a vital role within their support network too.

There are a number of ways you can be there for a loved one, but in doing so make sure you are also looking after yourself.

## Looking after yourself

As a carer you spend a lot of your time focusing on someone else. You may feel as if you have no time at all for yourself. Don't forget that looking after your own wellbeing is important for you and for them.

- Recognise that you are not to blame and try to ensure your loved one does not feel responsible either.
- Remind yourself that things can change and reassure your loved one that recovery is possible.
- Remember to look after yourself and to take some time to do things you find relaxing and enjoyable, this will help you to assist the person you are trying to help.
- Avoid discussing weight, shape, food, and diets in front of your loved one, and try to model a balanced relationship with your own food and exercise.

Remember that others in the family may not understand eating disorders and that you may feel **stuck on your own in the middle**. Take comfort in the fact that you are actively trying to understand and in the long term this is going to be of more use in your loved one's recovery.

# Supporting a loved one



## Making Plans

- Gently remind other family members to be sensitive to your loved one's difficulties and guard against making triggering comments.
- When making plans, think of social events that don't revolve around food or exercise, such as trying out different crafts, or playing board games.
- Encourage alternative family activities to take the emphasis away from food and eating.
- Whilst you and your family may be excited to reunite post-lockdown, remind yourself that socialising may be difficult for someone who is struggling at the moment.
- Try to avoid commenting on what your loved one is eating. What you think might be a positive remark such as 'wow, are you eating all of that like the rest of us?' might lead to them questioning their choice.
- Even if their eating disorder causes them to withdraw, keep inviting them to join in with group and family activities.

## General Advice

It is important to ask your loved one how they are feeling and what they are thinking, rather than making assumptions. If they feel comfortable talking to you, try to listen and accept what you're told, whilst remaining patient and understanding.

It is also important to take time to discuss topics outside of the illness and treatment – this can feel very tricky but your loved one is still there despite the eating disorder.

And remember, whilst it is good to make plans, be aware that not everything will go smoothly and you may just have to accept and adapt.

## Communication is key

As things begin to change, start with asking your loved one what you can do to help. Examples could be;

- helping them to stick to regular eating
- putting in boundaries following mealtimes
- having a space to talk about how they are feeling.

Your loved one may respond that you can just "leave them alone" or that you can't do anything to help, so it can be helpful to remind them you understand how difficult things are, and you are there if they need you.



**Whilst it is great to look ahead and keep moving forward, don't wipe the past year out of your mind. Think about what you have achieved on a personal level, and let that be a reminder when you're feeling guilty, anxious or stressed.**

We hope this guide will help you adjust to this new 'normal', but remember to go at your own pace. We have all gained a whole new perspective on life in the last 12 months, so it's okay if your goals have changed or if you've realised what is important to you (and what isn't!). It is time to rebuild your routine in a way that suits you and if you decide to do things a bit differently this time around that's okay!

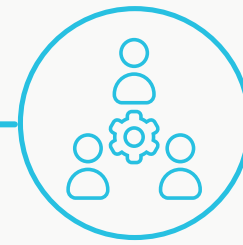
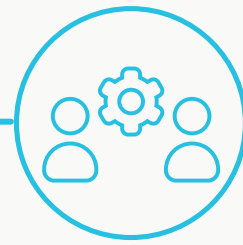
If you do feel like you are struggling with your mental health right now, it is important that you try to find support, whether it be with your family, GP or the team here at First Steps ED. The next couple of pages have some more information about our services, as well as resources that may help you as the restrictions begin to lift.

To make a referral, [click here](#). Please note: First Steps ED is not a crisis line. In case of crisis, please call 999 or the Samaritans on 116 123 (or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org))





# Service Breakdown



## Referrals

We can provide help to anyone who is facing difficulty with mental health, mood, or their relationship with body or food and it all starts with a referral. Referrals are open to all ages, genders and backgrounds and there doesn't need to be an official mental health diagnosis from a registered health professional.

## One-to-Ones

Our counsellors and psychotherapists provide 1:1 therapy (available face-to-face, online or over the phone.) This is a safe space, giving you the time and freedom to talk.

We also have our befriending service, where we match service users with one of our highly trained and supervised befriendees.

## Group Support

The team offer a number of activities and support groups throughout the week, with the aim to make them fun and stress free.

Groups are not just for anyone struggling with body image, disordered eating or an eating disorder, but are open to anyone with an underlying general mental health condition.

## Further Training

We offer a number of training opportunities for students and professionals, as well as parents and carers.

All training and workshops are facilitated by trusted training partners and are available either online or face-to-face. To learn more about upcoming training and events please visit our website.

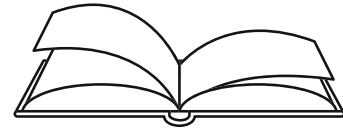


# Resources



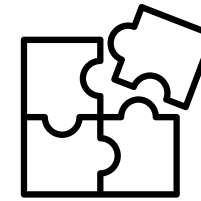
## Yoga sessions and mindfulness

Our Kundalini Yoga sessions focus on your mind on positivity, appreciation of the body and spiritual calming mantra. Join us every other Thursday for First Steps ED Yoga.



## Journaling and expression

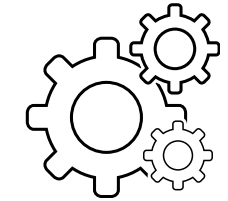
Start your own creative journal to track your progress as you recover. Some find journalising beneficial in learning how to work through different feelings and emotions.



## Training and Workshops

Looking for a better understanding of mental health?

Follow our eventbrite page for the latest events and training!



## Guides and resources

Check out our website and digital hub for more information, support and resources.

Don't forget to follow us on social media:





Our services have been developed alongside NHS eating disorders services and our staff and volunteers receive ongoing training and supervision inline with NICE and NHS England guidance and service standards.



[info@firststepsed.co.uk](mailto:info@firststepsed.co.uk)



01332 367571



[www.firststepsed.co.uk](http://www.firststepsed.co.uk)

FIRST STEPS ED  
REGISTERED CHARITY 1185092