

Amy Tuite, Occupational Therapist, Cluain Mhuire, April 2020

Table 1: © (Ross, 2007)

Sense	Calming	Alerting
Touch	Hugging, holding. Eg. Hand massage.	Rubbing. Eg. Rapidly rubbing your arms.
Balance	Slow movement. Eg. Rocking chair, walking.	Rapid movement. Eg. Running, dancing.
Muscle stretch	Moderate pressure. Eg. Wrapping in a blanket. Also gentle stretching. Eg. Yoga.	Rapid muscle stretch. Eg. Lifting heavy weights.
Visual	Low light, soft colours. Eg. Candlelight	Bright colours and lights. Eg. Disco lights.
Hearing	Slow rhythmic sounds. Eg. Piano music.	Irregular loud sounds. Eg. Rock music.
Smell	Sweet, faint smells. Eg. Lavender incense.	Pungent smells. Eg. Vinegar chips.
Taste	Smooth warm textures. Eg. Herbal tea.	Crunchy, strong flavours. Eg. Chilli crisps

Tips to remember:

- The benefits we get from sensory activities are different for everyone. What our brains need every day to stay well is also different for everyone. So do what works best for you.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing or have happy memories doing. This makes them work better. Things that you enjoyed as a child can also work.
- Our brains need to be in a “happy middle” to stay healthy. In times of stress our systems move out of “happy middle”. We can feel overwhelmed, like we want to “scream and shout”. We can also feel shutdown, like we’re “numb or frozen” and can’t do anything. Some activities in this handout may help you get back to “happy middle”.
- In general, calming activities work best when we’re feeling overwhelmed or shutdown.
- Combining activities that we enjoy makes the impact stronger. For example, doing yoga with candlelight and lavender incense.

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The next three pages have more tips on how to use your senses to stay well during Covid-19:

Move move move!



Why is this important?

The Covid-19 restrictions limit the movement of people to reduce the spread of the disease. We need to follow these rules. However, movement is one of the best activities we can do to stay well. Being sedentary is bad for our brains. We need to move as much as possible during the day to help us be physically and mentally healthy.

How do I do this?

- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/06de8b-be-well/> Healthy Ireland gives information on how much movement and exercise we need and ideas on how to start. Walking and dancing are two good examples.
- If you don't enjoy exercise, household tasks like hovering, sweeping and washing windows are some other good ways to bring more movement into your day.
- Yoga is another great way to move.
Yoga with Adrienne <https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene/playlists> has many videos for all skill levels. She discusses issues such as anger and anxiety in some videos and all you need to take part is a soft floor surface.
- Simple movements such as wall squats, wall push-ups, floor push-ups, planks and sit ups also work well. You can do these movements for short periods throughout the day to keep moving. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YB0egDzsu18&feature=emb_title
- If you like exercise, aerobic exercise has been proven to release harmful stress hormones from our systems. The Body Coach <https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1/playlists> has free videos for adults and children. There are videos for all levels and many require no equipment. Here is a 30 minute home workout with no equipment and with one broken arm!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXOZS3AKKOW&list=PLyCLOPd4VxBvExeOQmoCvr2RrXfvIJKjV>

Adapt and try something new



Why is this important?

The things we usually do to help us move between calm and alert during the day are personal to us. For example, hugs from our grandparents may make us calm and time at our favourite gym class may alert us. We all also have things that trigger us, for example arguments with siblings. Before Covid-19, we tried to have our favourite activities in our routine and avoid our triggers as much as possible. However now many of the activities we love are no longer possible and those that trigger us may be happening more often. It is important that we try and adapt. Think about why you enjoy your favourite activities, why do they work? How could you do them in a different way? What can you still do? You can also try replace the things you love with new activities.

How do I do this?

- Try writing down your favourite activities and the ones that trigger you. This may help you become more aware of them and adapt your routine.
- If you want to try new activities, the resource “Building a Healthy Routine at Home” on the Covid-19 webpage has many ideas that you could do at home.
- Pinterest is a website containing interest boards, most of which involve everyday household items. Below is a page containing household games for adults and kids.
https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/373587731572062452/sent/?invite_code=4ee967f9bc8640979680e5b402dfc0ba&sender=501447877168564537&sfo=1
- This link lists 100 free self-care ideas, some are quick and others will take more time.
<https://www.asthebirdfliesblog.com/posts/free-self-care-ideas>
- This link by ChatterPack contains free, online, boredom busting ideas.
https://chatterpack.net/blogs/blog/list-of-online-resources-for-anyone-who-is-isolated-at-home?fbclid=IwAR2mW8_y90KS6EdykeZSyEr8MVurJFh7Qkljtlif1cGo1zhcKD5ND8TJVd0
- This link is for an online Crisis Kit for difficult times such as Covid-19.
<https://positivepsychology.com/the-crisis-kit/>



Build a “safe space”

Why is this important?

The “fight or flight” system is one of the strongest that our brains have. This system keeps us safe, but it does not always work as it should. Mental health symptoms or past traumatic experiences can make our brains think we are not safe, when maybe we are. Covid-19 restrictions mean many of us are spending more time at home and with the people we live with. If our home is not a positive environment for us then our “fight or flight” system may be switched on too much. This can be exhausting and is not healthy for our brains. It can also block our brains from getting the benefits from any positive sensory activities we’re doing. It is important that we have a “safe space” that we can use when we feel overwhelmed.

How do I do this?

- If you have your own bedroom, or another room that you like to use, try setting some boundaries with the people you live with. Ask them to knock before they enter the room, or try using a “do not disturb” sign. Allow yourself a “safe space” to relax without disturbance.
- Decorate your “safe space” and make it your own. Pinterest has many ideas for creative ways to decorate your room. Maybe include some ideas from the table on page 2.
<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/search/pins/?q=bedroom%20decoration&rs=typed>
- If you can’t create a “safe space” in your house, make this space outside. Choose your favourite green space to sit or your favourite walking route and spend time here. Be sure to still respect governmental guidelines and restrictions.

Final thoughts

Becoming aware of what our brains need to stay well is very beneficial. However, we also must remember to be kind to ourselves and not put ourselves under extra pressure. We’re already doing brilliantly.

Cluain Mhuire Occupational Therapy Department

"If your compassion
does not include
yourself,
it's incomplete."

-Buddha

THE HEALTH SESSIONS