

BUBBLING OVER? MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

As the global pandemic takes hold, for many of us our mental health has been impacted. This poster visualises mental health during this period to help us make sense of what we may be feeling.

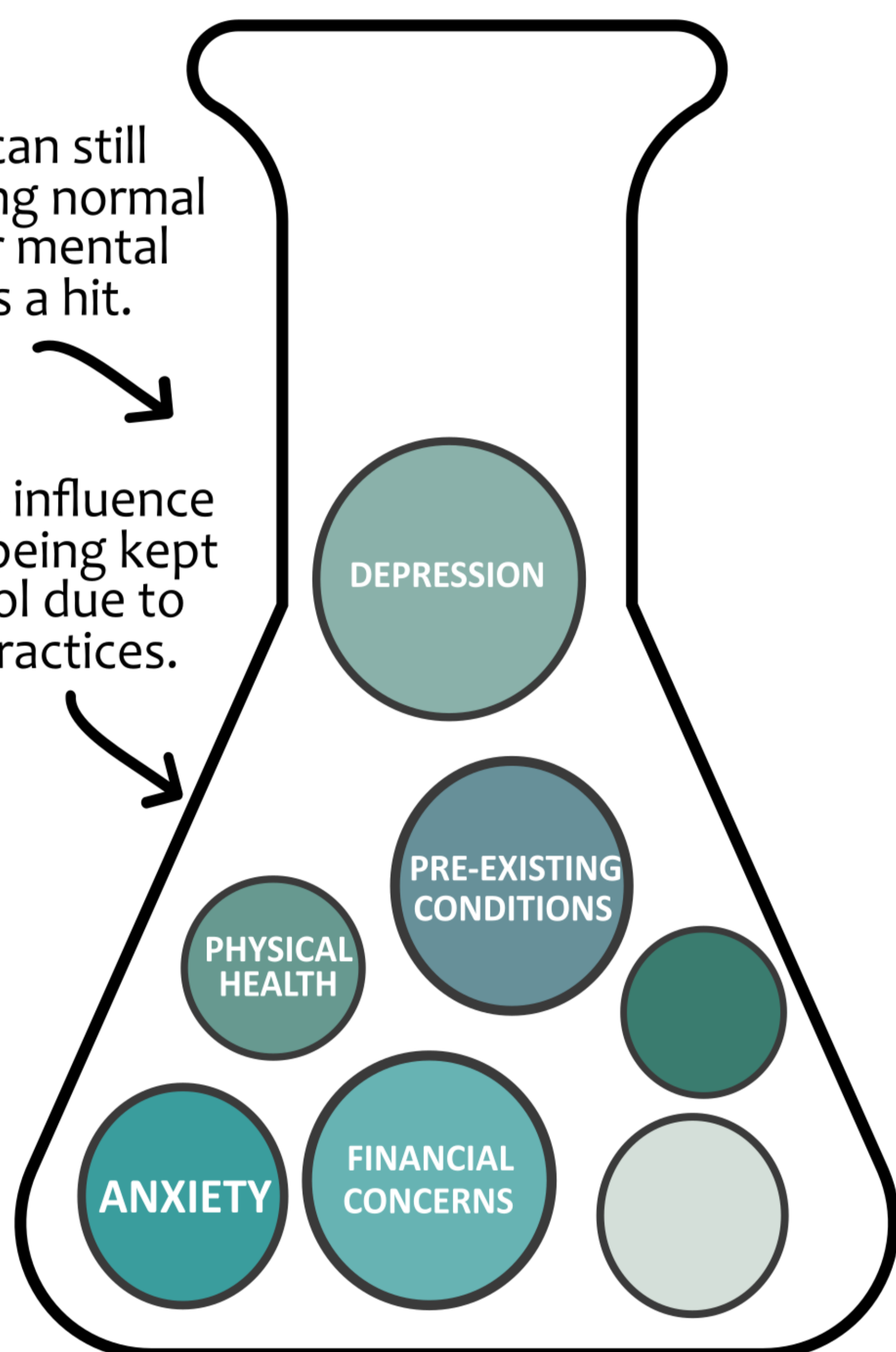
This visualisation is an adaptation of the jam-jar metaphor¹ for mental health. Once the vessel is full, a person has no more room to cope with environmental stress and feelings may 'bubble over' leading to a psychiatric episode. By building coping strategies, we can learn to adapt, prioritise our health and grow the size of the flask.

The exact mix of factors that are in the flask vary person to person.

PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC

The beaker can still overflow during normal life when our mental health takes a hit.

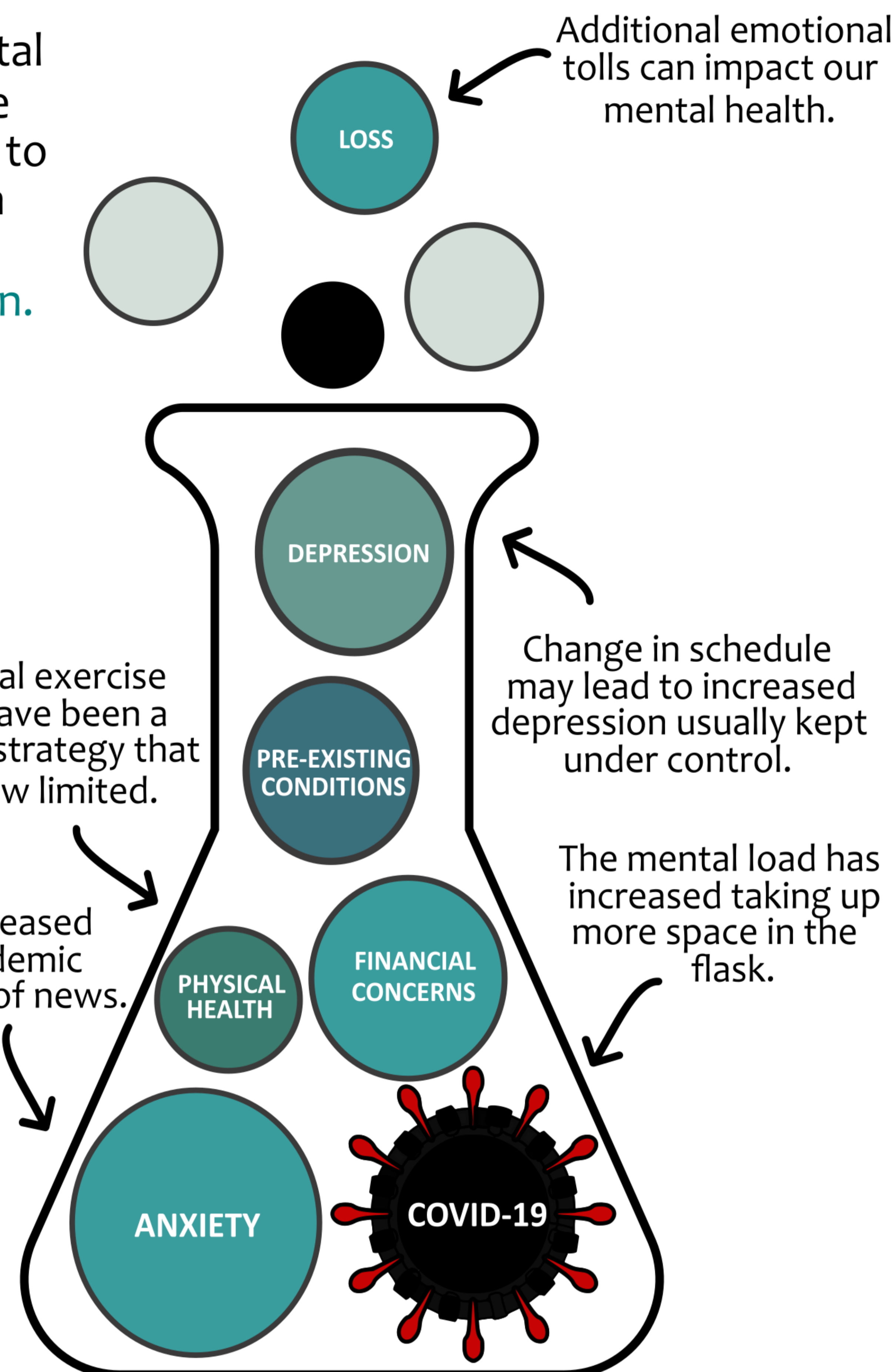
Factors that influence overall wellbeing kept under control due to self-care practices.



DURING THE PANDEMIC

Physical exercise may have been a coping strategy that is now limited.

Anxiety increased due to pandemic and barrage of news.



Change in schedule may lead to increased depression usually kept under control.

The mental load has increased taking up more space in the flask.

SOME TIPS TO MANAGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19 (AND PREVENT THE FLASK GETTING FULL)



SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to a medical professional about how you are feeling. Your feelings are valid irrespective of a pandemic. This may lead to intervention such as medication or counselling to help you manage your mental health.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL



In a time where many things feel out of our control focusing on what we *can* control can help us be less anxious and worried. We can then channel that energy into other areas.



MAKE TIME FOR EXERCISE

Endorphins released during sport can lift our mood. If it's getting outside for a run, or lifting tin cans of beans in the house, or stretching, doing a little bit of exercise is important.



CREATE A SCHEDULE

By planning your days you can concentrate on the things you *can* control. The important thing here is to give yourself both a degree of accountability, yet be forgiving if you don't achieve everything you aim for.



COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS

Talk through how you are feeling with others. Reach out to loved ones and make sure to stay connected during this time. There are a range of support groups and forums online.



PRODUCTIVITY COMES SECOND

We must recognise that basic needs like food, health and family need to come first during this time. Only then can we be productive. Let people know if you are struggling to hit deadlines.



LEARN SOMETHING NEW

If you have the capacity to, learning a new hobby or skill to destress over this period may be a way to help you manage your feelings and distract you from what is happening.



LET GO OF THE GUILT

Even if it's just a minute per day, taking the time to reflect, be present, and relax can be incredibly calming. There are some excellent apps available to get you started.

STRUGGLING WITH ISOLATION?
NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO?

CALL SAMARITANS NOW ON **116-123**

Find more about the Jam-Jar concept for mental health here:

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/mental-health-and-me/depression>

Part of the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoë Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.

SCIENTIST WITHOUT A LAB? A PHD RESEARCHER GUIDE TO COVID-19

In these unprecedented times, many of us are finding ourselves without the ability to perform lab work and are having to self-isolate. This poster explores some of the options for PhD researchers in this uncertain period to help alleviate pressure, guide productivity and maintain mental wellness.



WRITE YOUR INTRO

Take this opportunity to review your field, understand seminal work and write your thesis introduction. Consider writing a review article - this often can be used as an introduction!



BUILD YOUR EXPERIMENTAL

You know roughly what techniques you will use. Write about how the techniques work and detail your procedures from your lab books. If your lab books are, well, lacking - time to fix that!



MAKE BEAUTIFUL FIGURES

Often neglected - make some great figures to go in your thesis. Use the time to get to grips with graphical software - a skillset useful beyond the PhD.



CONNECT WITH COLLEAGUES

Use online tools to speak to colleagues such as Zoom/Skype. Consider team coffee breaks or lunches too! Use this time to connect with collaborators across the globe.



CREATE A SCHEDULE

Think about creating a schedule to stick to, as well as using tools like the pomodoro method to manage your time. Remember no one works solidly all day - take breaks!



LEARN TO CODE

Automating data processing by investing in your ability to code will ultimately make your lab work faster and smoother when you return to the lab.



CREATE TEST PLANS

Plan out your experiments so that when you get back in the lab you can be super efficient with your remaining time. Don't underestimate the importance of thinking time!



WORK ON PAPERS

Use this time to write up papers for publication. Not enough data? No problem! Write about what you expect to see and collect the data/modify the draft when you return.



LET GO OF THE GUILT

Remember, everyone is in the same position and productivity will drop. COVID-19 is *not* your fault. Doing what you can is good enough.



TAKE TIME FOR YOU

Isolation can take its toll. Make sure to take time for you, doing other things you enjoy. Most importantly, look after your health. Family and your wellness comes first!

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