

---

## Your relationship during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

---

**Maybe you are self-isolating with your partner, or perhaps you are both in different places. Either way, this uncertain time can put extra pressure on your relationship. But it can also create opportunities.**

### Make time to talk to each other

We are all adjusting to a new way of being at the moment. We can experience different emotions at different times, and these may feel overwhelming. Your thoughts and emotions may be connected to Coronavirus, your cancer and its treatment, and other things that are going on in life. Although Coronavirus is worrying it does not mean that all your other problems have stopped.

It is important to find the space to share what you're thinking and feeling with your partner so that you can remain as connected as possible. Sharing how we are feeling can also help to stop resentments building up. Maybe find a dedicated time during the day, for example half an hour in the evening, to share how you are feeling and to listen to each other. Knowing that you have this time available can help you carry on with the rest of the day. This can be hard to do if there are young children in the house, however, it is potentially even more important to do as it may be the only time that you are together on your own.

### Be organised so you have time apart

Try to have some structure to your day, so that everyone knows what they are doing. This can include things like room organisation - who is going to be where and when? This can be difficult in flats/ small homes so try and be creative. Make sure that time is balanced between space for yourself as well as together. Support each other to be boundaried around this time.

### Discover new things together

How would you and your partner like to spend your time together? Can you use this time to try new things? It does not matter what you are doing so long as both people are willing to have a go. This could be doing a puzzle, yoga, cooking a meal together, learning a new language. There are many online tutorials and ideas. The possibilities are endless. Remember that you are more likely to keep doing activities that you both find enjoyable and meaningful. It's also important to bear in mind the impact of cancer and treatment on your physical health and energy levels – you can only engage in activities if you can physically do them, and this may vary throughout the day, weeks or months.

### Have fun together

The secret to keeping a relationship fresh is fun, surprise and excitement. Laughter is a great stress buster. Learn to be comfortable with silliness. You could hide little notes for each other or send a cheeky text message. Try taking it in turns to plan a 'date night' for each other. You may need to be extra creative about this as you can't go out, so how could you plan a date for each other within your own home?

### Make time for intimacy and sex

The way you feel about sex may change. Some people may feel more inclined towards sexual intimacy and others may feel the opposite, especially if one of both of you has been ill (from Coronavirus or due to cancer or its treatment). The extra time together may create more opportunities to be intimate, or having your family around might make things difficult. Listen



to yourself here, there is no right or wrong. Try and share with your partner how you are feeling – intimacy is an emotional and physical experience and so talking openly about your concerns and appreciations is helpful. If you don't feel like having sex, remember that other forms of intimacy such as holding hands and hugging can help you to feel close and connected.

## Isolating away from your partner

Being in self-isolation in a different home to your partner can be difficult. But it can also create opportunities for a different sort of connection. As well as using phone and video calls to connect, try sending old fashioned love letters or a text message. You can tell each other how much you miss each other and talk about and plan all the things you are going to do when you meet up again. Being apart can create the space for longing and desire.

## Do I feel safe?

Staying at home may not always feel like a safe place. Remember if you feel unsafe there are services you can contact.

- **Police.** When someone calls **999**, an operator will ask which emergency service is required. If the caller is unable to audibly signal to the operator, the call will be forwarded to an operating system. If **55** is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this. The operator will then transfer the call to the relevant police force as an emergency.
- **Refuge.** For women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Call 24/7 freephone 0808 2000 247 or visit [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)
- **Respect.** For men experiencing domestic abuse. Call freephone 0808 8010327 Monday to Friday (9am-5pm Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays; 9am-8pm Mondays and Wednesdays. The call will not appear on the bill), or visit [www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

The above is a short summary of how to cope with self-isolation or shielding during the Coronavirus pandemic. If you would like further advice the following websites offer self-help resources and additional support:

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

[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips)

Copyright © 2020 The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust  
All rights reserved

Published June 2020  
Planned review September 2020

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre  
Freephone: 0800 783 7176  
Email: [patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk](mailto:patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk)

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust  
Fulham Road  
London SW3 6JJ

[www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk](http://www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk)

No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any way whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of going to print.