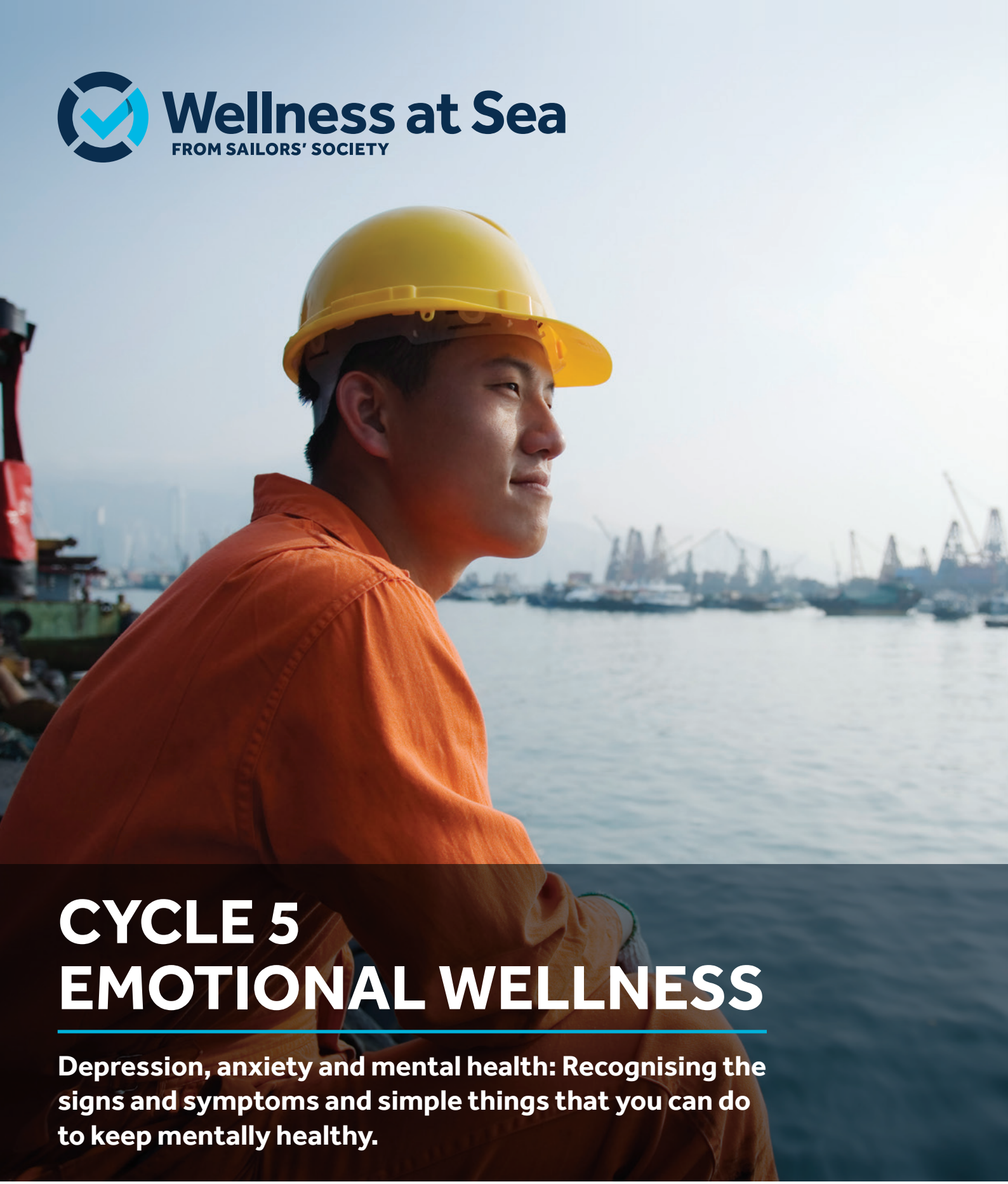
Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY



# CYCLE 5
# EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

**Depression, anxiety and mental health: Recognising the signs and symptoms and simple things that you can do to keep mentally healthy.**

Australian Government
Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Sailors' Society



Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY

# WELCOME TO WELLNESS AT SEA CYCLE 5: WEEKS 13-15

Dear Friend,

How are you doing? I trust that you've found the information that we've shared through the Wellness at Sea Awareness Campaign up to now, meaningful.

Previously, we've discussed the difference between mental health and mental illness and also talked about the many myths that are so often associated with mental health. In this next cycle, we'll be digging deeper and exploring a bit more about depression and anxiety and what you can do to cope with life at sea.

As I've said before, these are challenging times for us all. The current pandemic has plunged the world into uncertainty and it is only natural to feel stressed, concerned, angry or anxious. Even before the pandemic, the mental stress that many seafarers can experience was a massive concern.

Consider these stats released by Yale University in 2019, pre-Covid:

- 25% of seafarers completing a patient health questionnaire had scores suggesting signs of depression (significantly higher than other working and general populations)
- 17% of seafarers completing a generalised anxiety disorder questionnaire were defined as seafarers with anxiety
- 20% of seafarers surveyed had suicidal thoughts, either several days (12.5%), more than half the days (5%) or nearly every day (2%) over the two weeks prior to taking the survey
- Depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts were associated with increased likelihood of injury and illness while working on board the vessel
- Seafarer depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts were associated with increased likelihood of planning to leave work as a seafarer in the next six months

Unfortunately, the pandemic has catapulted mental health issues even further and that is why it is so important for us to have you as part of this conversation.

In Cycle 5, we'll be discussing a few everyday things that can help you to care for yourself including:

- knowing the signs so that you can take action should you or a friend, or co-worker get depressed
- a depression test you can take when you are worried about yourself
- top tips for keeping mentally healthy
- some advice to those seafarers who are feeling low or unable to sign off, particularly given the pressures of the pandemic
- some tips to help you cope mentally with the stresses of COVID-19

The action for Cycle 5 involves you taking the depression test. It is something that you can do by yourself. Please note, this test does not diagnose you but instead raises any red flags and assists you to know when to seek help.

We've been talking a lot about where to get help and I want to again remind you that Sailors' Society's team is here for you. If you are feeling anxious or depressed, reach out for a confidential chat today!

Keep well and healthy,



Johan Smith
Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme manager

**Need help?**
Email **crisis@sailors-society.org** visit **www.facebook.com/SailorsSocietyCRN**, go to **www.sailors-society.org/helpline** or call our helpline **+1-938-222-8181**

Sailors' Society

**Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.**
**For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness**

Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY



# DEPRESSION: KNOW THE SIGNS

**Depression is the leading cause of mental health issues – and recognising it is the first step to getting help.**

**All of us have bad days, but the key to recognising there may be a more serious problem is the frequency of the symptoms below. Understanding the signs can help you know whether to seek professional advice.**

## EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS

- Displaying unusual behaviour or changes in usual behaviour
- Being withdrawn
- Aggression or tearfulness
- Loss of humour
- Loss of confidence
- Disruptive behaviour
- Inability to concentrate on tasks, increased errors, missing deadlines or forgetting tasks
- Increased consumption of caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes and/or sedatives
- Difficulty remembering things
- Poor job performance
- Becoming withdrawn, not participating in conversations or social activities and spending increasing amounts of time alone in cabins
- An employee who is normally punctual frequently arriving late

## FEELINGS

- Irritable
- Anxious
- Overwhelmed
- Worthless
- Frustrated
- Unhappy
- Disappointed
- Sad
- Indecisive
- Unmotivated

## PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Suffering from frequent minor illnesses, headaches or stomach upsets
- Difficulty sleeping or constant tiredness or feeling of fatigue
- Lack of care over appearance
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Minor physical ailments
- Displaying unusual behavior or marked changes in behavior

## THOUGHTS

- 'I am a failure'
- 'It's my fault'
- 'Nothing good ever happens to me'
- 'I'm worthless'
- 'Life is not worth living'

Sailors' Society

Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.
For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness



Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY

# DEPRESSION: SHOULD YOU GET HELP?

**Depression is the leading cause of mental health issues – and recognising it is the first step to getting better. The simple checklist below can help you know whether you should seek professional support.**

## FOR MORE THAN TWO WEEKS HAVE YOU:

1. Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time?
2. Lost interest or pleasure in most of your usual activities?

**If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, complete the symptom checklist below. If you did not answer "yes" to either of these questions, it is unlikely that you have a depressive illness.**

3. Lost or gained a lot of weight or had a decrease OR increase in appetite?
4. Had sleep disturbance?
5. Felt slowed down, restless or excessively busy?
6. Felt tired or had no energy
7. Felt worthless? OR Felt excessively guilty? OR Felt guilt about things you should not have been feeling guilty about?
8. Had poor concentration? OR Had difficulties thinking? OR Been very indecisive?
9. Had recurrent thoughts of death?

**Add up the number of ticks to questions 3 – 9 for your total score:**

**What does your score mean?**

(assuming you answered "yes" to question 1 and/or question 2)

**4 or less:** unlikely to have a depressive illness.

**5 or more:** likely to have a depressive illness.

**For further assessment, or if you are concerned about any of these symptoms, please call our confidential 24/7 helpline on +1-938-222-8181 or instant chat via: sailors-society.org/wellness**

**Remember, depression is treatable and effective treatments are available – the earlier you seek help, the better.**

**Please note, this test does not diagnose you, but instead raises any red flags and assists you to know when to seek help. We've been talking a lot about where to get help and I want to again remind you that Sailors' Society's team is there for you.**

Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.
For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness

Sailors' Society

Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY



# TOP TIPS TO KEEP MENTALLY FIT

## SHARE YOUR PROBLEMS

Talking about your feelings is a positive step towards good mental health. Try to talk to people you trust about your experiences and emotions. If you have the opportunity to regularly talk to someone on shore it will help a lot.

If communication is a problem and you are bound to your ship, identify someone on board you can trust. If all else fails try to write your emotions and feelings in a diary and reflect on previous days and your general mood.

## EAT HEALTHILY

There is a strong link between what we eat and how we feel. Make sure that you are comfortable with your diet and be on the lookout for food that triggers certain emotions.

## LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS

Caring for others is often an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you. It can even bring you closer together. You now have the knowledge to see the signs of poor mental health in someone else – reach out, and give a helping hand where you can.

## STAY IN TOUCH

Friends and family can make you feel included and cared for. They can offer different views from whatever is going on in your own head.

It is sometimes difficult to keep in touch when you are at sea. Perhaps write a letter about what you are experiencing and make sure that it is posted in the next port you visit. Make 'remember notes' on important stories you want to tell the people you care for.

Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.
For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness

Sailors' Society

Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY

# TOP TIPS TO KEEP MENTALLY FIT



## KEEP FIT

Experts believe that exercise releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep, look and feel better. Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy. Many exercise programmes exist that are specifically aimed at helping you keep fit on board. Work out a fitness routine that will fit in with your specific circumstances while on board.



## LEARN TO BE COMFORTABLE IN YOUR OWN SKIN

Some of us make people laugh, some are good at maths while others cook fantastic meals. Some of us share our lifestyle with the people who live close to us, others live very differently. We're all different. Accept that you are a unique human being, unlike anyone else out there.



## HAVE A REST

A change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health. It could be a five minute pause from the task you are busy with or a half hour lunch break in a different location on the ship. A few minutes can be enough to de-stress you.



## ASK FOR HELP

None of us are superhuman. We all get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel, or when things go wrong. If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. You can call Sailors' Society's helpline on **+1-938-222-8181** or instant chat via: **sailors-society.org/wellness** any time for a confidential chat.

Your employer values your mental health – that's why they have signed up to the Wellness at Sea Awareness Campaign.



## DO SOMETHING YOU ENJOY

What do you love doing? What activities can you lose yourself in? What did you love doing in the past? Enjoying yourself helps beat stress. Doing an activity you enjoy probably means you're good at it and achieving something boosts your self-esteem. Make sure you take an activity you like with you on board.

**Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.**
**For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness**

Sailors' Society

Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY



# IN THE CURRENT SITUATION OF COVID-19, WHAT ADVICE CAN WE GIVE TO SEAFARERS WHO ARE FEELING LOW OR UNABLE TO SIGN OFF?

Seafarers are in a really tough spot right now and we can't for a moment imagine the disappointment of not being able to go home. Disappointment is a tough nut to crack and often brings feelings of sadness, anger, blame, doubt and a whole list of other doom and gloom emotions. It really sucks! It has a way of hovering around in our minds, chipping away at positive thoughts and almost sucking the air out of everyday life. It can lead to a very melancholic and despondent outlook on life.

It's easier said than done of course, but by rethinking your situation you can shift the focus from being a victim of circumstances to taking control. Here's how:

Be sure that they will pop out eventually. I'm not suggesting sulking in your bunk for a few days, but take time to just experience your emotions. Perhaps write them down or verbalise them by talking to a crew mate. How about writing an old-fashioned letter to a loved one explaining how you feel and asking the shipping agent in the next port to please post it? But do so without blaming someone – just describe how you feel. It is not about blame, but rather about acknowledging and naming your emotions. Firstly, accept how you feel - it's OK! You have every right to be disappointed about not being able to sign off. We live in a world of quick fixes. When we try to fix our souls with catchphrases like 'just get over it', we don't allow our hearts and minds to process what is happening and we simply shift our emotions to a dark corner where we try to hide them behind lock and key.

I've said that we live in a world of quick fixes. The world we live in also has a disdainful disregard for feelings like sadness and sorrow as if these take away from the beauty of life. We try to fix these with everything from happy pills to adrenaline shots. But, to live life in all its fullness, means to also embrace sadness and sorrow and finding the beauty in it. It is a very real part of being human. Perhaps our souls need to also understand these emotions to ultimately be happy.

In your current situation, big picture thinking can be a great help. Understanding that you are not alone in your disappointment can be really useful. The reality is that thousands of seafarers are in the exact same situation. we are not saying 'get over it' or questioning the legitimacy of what you're feeling, but if you acknowledge that others are experiencing the same thing, it shares the burden of disappointment.

And keep in mind that you are not a disappointment. The situation may be, but you are not. This pandemic is beyond our control. We do however have a choice in how we react to it. There are things that we can control – recognise that and focus on these.

You might find it helpful to listen to our free podcast on how to help manage your mental and emotional well-being through this crisis. You can access it here: **www.sailors-society.org/assets/site/How-to-cope-with-coronavirus.mp3**

Lastly, we want you to dream. Disappointment has a sneaky way of casting shadows over our dreams and hopes. Take some time to sit down and dream about life to come. All the things that you can and will still one day do. You are going places – it's up to you where those places are. The possibilities are infinite. Dream big.

Sailors' Society

**Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.**
**For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness**

Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY

# HELPING YOU COPE WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID-19

These are challenging times for us all. The current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has plunged the world into uncertainty and it is only natural to feel stressed, concerned, angry or anxious. We know things can feel even worse when you are far from home, friends and family.

You may be feeling particularly low or frustrated because you are overdue sign off due to the latest restrictions and don't know when you'll be able to return home, or you may be understandably concerned for your loved ones or feeling guilty that you cannot be with them.

On top of the practical steps you should take, there are some things you and your crewmates can do to help manage your anxiety during these tough times and to support each other through.

Here are our top ten tips:

## 1. CHALLENGE YOUR SELF-TALK:

The way we think influences the way we feel and can result in anxious, depressed and out-of-control feelings. These worse-case feelings often exaggerate danger and underestimate your ability to handle it. Be conscious of your thoughts and steer them in a positive direction.

## 2. PLAN WORRY TIME:

Not worrying is easier said than done! Schedule ten minutes of 'worry time', indulging in all your concerns. Write them down or give them a name, as verbalizing your fears can help alleviate them. Once this is done, make a conscious effort to substitute worrying thoughts with positive memories. If this is hard, identify your fear, make a mental note of it and schedule some 'worry time' to handle it. Now shift your focus.

## 3. FACTS MINIMISE FEAR:

With headlines blaring at us and media outlets competing to break the news first, having the right facts is crucial. Misinformation catapults anxiety. Seek information from reliable sources (such as those listed below) and use it so that you can take steps to protect yourself and those around you. Look for information updates at specific times to avoid feeling overwhelmed or confused and consider muting some of your social media channels.

## 4. TAKE A SOCIAL MEDIA HOLIDAY:

While social media is a great for keeping connected to our families, it can be detrimental when everyone is in panic mode and intensify our feelings of missing out on family events. Take a break for a few hours or even a day and try to see some beauty in the situation that you are in on board your vessel.

## 5. STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION:

With the global nature of the coronavirus, chances are that your fellow crewmates are experiencing the same thing. Talk to them and express your anxieties and fear. Knowing that you are not alone can do a great deal! Be a change agent by shifting discuss the global pandemic in more positive ways by discussing the recoveries and countries where good strategies work rather then just the fatality toll.

## 6. SLOW BREATHING:

Anxiousness causes faster and shallower breathing. Try to take a short break from your work on deck, bridge or in the engine-room and intentionally slow your breathing. Count to five while inhaling slowly – and then do a countdown as you blow out your breath.

Sailors' Society

**Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.**
**For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness**

Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY

# HELPING YOU COPE WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID-19

### 7. MUSCLE RELAXATION EXERCISES:

Find a quiet and peaceful place on your vessel. With closed eyes, start from your toes and slowly tense and relax each of your muscle groups from your toes to your head. Hold the tension for a count of five seconds and then slowly release it, by again counting to five. Muscle tension is often a sign of anxiety and dealing with this, helps release your fears. You may also find meditation or prayer helpful. Meditation apps such as Calm and Headspace have both released free digital sessions or you could participate in an online worship service.

### 8. KEEP IN MIND THAT YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR EMOTIONS:

Your social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual wellness plays a role in your mental health. If you have free time between shifts, consider each of these aspects and think how they can assist you with a positive outlook.

### 9. BODY AND MIND WORK TOGETHER:

Try to eat healthily and make time to exercise. Take a run or a walk on the deck. Exercise releases endorphins in your bloodstream and can elevate your mood.

### 10. BE KIND TO YOURSELF:

You are WAY more than your emotions. You are not your fears and anxiety. Give yourself a break. You are of great value!

Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.
For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness

Sailors' Society







**sailors-society.org/wellness**

**Produced as part of Sailors' Society's Wellness at Sea programme. Not to be reproduced without permission.**
**For more info on partnering on Wellness at Sea go to www.sailors-society.org/wellness**
Registered Charity No. 237778. Registered Company No. 86942.
Sailors' Society Scotland. Charity registered in Scotland no. SC041887. Registered Company No. SC387850.