



Overcoming the Covid effect



Hello, my name is Kate and I work as a mental health dietitian within the trust.

The past year has felt surreal for most and I believe everyone has had to dig deep on inner reserves of patience, tolerance, creativity, and resilience. Lockdown number three hit us all hard and it was a case of us all having to tough it out.

Pottering in the garden was always a good way to unwind and immerse myself with insects, birdsong and lovely autumn colours after days stuck in front of a computer screen. When the dark nights came in and winter chill set in and I would curl up on my sofa trying to lose myself in a book.

I became addicted to watching autumn and winter watch, their cosy messages, beautiful imagery and friendly presenters reminding me of nature's power to heal. I remember thinking one evening after a particular frustrating day working from home; how am I going to get through the next six hours on my own apart from the normal chores of dinner, washing up, catching up with laundry and housework and the inevitable trip to the supermarket?

I moved in the summer of 2020 to a new place in a rural leafy area, compact and cosy but I didn't know my neighbours and couldn't do the normal things like join the local church or try out adult education classes.

It all got a bit too much as one by one the things that had kept me sane disappeared. I could no longer play tennis, meet my friends at our favourite coffee shop, seek solace with friendly chats in the office, visit my sister in the Scottish Highlands, go to a live show, eat out with my partner, or be with my children - both having fled the nest for university and work.

I admitted to myself I was feeling terribly isolated, working from home, depressed and incredibly anxious to the point where it was impacting on my sleep and ability to perform at work.



Loss of sleep was the last straw as I would wake up in the wee hours most nights feeling an incredible fear and anxiety, heart racing, thoughts jumbled and there was a gaping mismatch between my perceived ability to perform and cope at work and being competent in my role.

Further feelings stirred such as guilt - I hadn't succumbed to COVID and no one close to me had either but I felt terribly sick and powerless as the number of COVID deaths grew. I'm quite a sensitive person and I was deeply aware of my colleagues own struggles both within my team and in the units I covered. I started to question my role and thought what on earth am I doing? Shouldn't I be going out supporting those on the front line? The thought of not working made me feel even more guilty until I admitted to myself that sleep deprivation was now making me physically ill, losing weight and becoming ever more anxious to the point where I could no longer make any decisions.

My road to recovery started with admitting that I was ill and contacting my GP and Pam Assist at work. I was informed there was a huge back log of referrals for counselling and CBT because everyone else was in the same boat. That brought me a great deal of relief. I had to wait eight weeks for counselling and struggled on bravely at work, riding out Christmas and the New Year as if I had entered a marathon without any sustenance or training.

The Pam Assist counsellor was excellent giving me practical strategies to cope with sleep deprivation and validating my feelings, making me feel entirely normal. Ironically, I was one of the first cohorts of trust employees to complete the psychological first aid training back in autumn last year and I realised I was experiencing all the classic physical and psychological symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Now fast forward to happier times. Spring watch is just around the corner and I've booked a camping trip on the Isle of Wight next week and I don't care if it rains every day.

I will finish with a quote from *"the Boy, the Mole the Fox and the Horse"*.....



Kate Sheldon, Nutrition & Dietetics team, BSMHFT