

Coronavirus lifestyle recommendations for BAME Staff

Coronavirus is a major concern for us right now for all of our staff and patients, but recent research has suggested a disproportionate number of deaths among BAME people, including in NHS workers.

At the time of writing, 34% of confirmed Covid-19 cases and 32% of deaths in intensive care are those with BAME backgrounds (compared with 14.5% of the total population who are of BAME origin) according to statistics from the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre, covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland. With this in mind, it is important that we take every measure we can to enable our BAME staff to feel supported and advise you in the best possible way.

We would encourage you to discuss and express any views and concerns either by contacting our Equality Leads:

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It is still important that you do everything you can to look after your health, as well as taking the measures to distance yourself from the virus. In addition to your ethnic background and age, your risk from Covid-19 also appears linked to pre-existing medical conditions, particularly heart and circulatory disease and their risk factors.



High Blood Pressure:

Blood pressure is the pressure of blood in your arteries – the vessels that carry your blood from your heart to your brain and the rest of your body. Some people naturally have high blood pressure due to genetics or age, but lifestyle in many cases plays a big role. Advice to help reduce blood pressure surrounds only drinking alcohol if in moderation, not smoking, having a healthy weight, doing regular exercise, reducing salt consumption and taking measures to reduce stress.

Studies have shown it is also more common if you are of black African or black Caribbean descent. A blood pressure monitor (a sphygmomanometer) is connected to an inflatable cuff that is wrapped around your upper arm, and will give you a blood pressure reading. The recommendation is that your blood pressure should be below 140/90, but every person is different and so it is important that you talk through any concerns regarding a reading with your GP.

For information regarding high blood pressure, [please visit here](#).



Diabetes:

Diabetes is a condition that causes high levels of glucose (a type of sugar) in your blood. There are 2 types of Diabetes, Type 1 which typically affects children and young adults and Type 2 which tends to develop more gradually. Studies have shown there is a higher rate of Type 2 Diabetes in some ethnic groups, those of South Asian and African Caribbean origin have found to be at a higher risk. Advice to reduce the risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes focusses on being more active, eating a healthy and balanced diet, keeping a healthy weight, not smoking and being aware of any family history.

Type 2 Diabetes is diagnosed through a blood test issued by your GP and they may also test your urine. There is medication for Diabetes, but alongside these you can manage it well with positive lifestyle changes, and managing Diabetes is important to help reduce risk of heart disease or stroke.

For more information regarding diabetes, [please click here](#).



Obesity:

Being overweight or obese can lead to many serious health conditions and can increase your risk of heart and circulatory diseases such as heart attack, stroke and vascular dementia. When you eat and drink more calories than you use, the body stores these excess calories as body fat. It is also important to remember that some medications and medical conditions can lead to weight gain.

When someone is obese or overweight, it is when their visceral fat is high that health complications are more likely to occur, as this is the fat that surrounds our internal organs. It affects your hormones and can lead to raised cholesterol, an increase in blood pressure and increased risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes. Adults of South Asian or African Caribbean origin are recommended to keep their BMI level below 25, although it is also important to not just rely on BMI and also to look at other measurements such as Waist Measurement to get an idea of how much visceral fat you may have.

For more information around obesity and weight, [please click here](#).

Vitamin D: Frequently Asked Questions

You may have started to hear about Vitamin D recently and how it may link to the body defending itself from the impact of Covid-19. Here are some frequently asked questions about Vitamin D:

What does vitamin D do?

Vitamin D controls calcium and phosphate levels in the body. This helps to maintain bones, teeth, muscles and general wellbeing.

Is there a link between vitamin D deficiency and COVID-19?

There is ongoing research but no answers yet. Avoiding deficiency is still a good idea whether you are worried about COVID-19 or not.

Who is most at risk of low levels of vitamin D?

Low levels of vitamin D are also called “vitamin D deficiency”. National advice tells us there is a greater risk of vitamin D deficiency amongst those who are aged over 65, are overweight, pregnant or breastfeeding, are spending a lot of time indoors or have darker skin tones such as those of a BAME background.

How much vitamin D should I be taking every day?

Normally you will get enough vitamin D from sunlight between March and September. However the NHS is recommending that we take 400 units of vitamin D each day if we are at risk, to prevent deficiency.

What are the effects of vitamin D deficiency?

The main symptoms are bone pain or unexplained tiredness.

What should I do if I have signs of vitamin D deficiency?

You should discuss this with your GP. Serious deficiency is treated medically with higher doses of vitamin D than those usually taken in supplements.

Is there anyone who should not take vitamin D supplements?

You should not take these supplements if you are already taking supplements or medicines that contain vitamin D (sometimes called colecalciferol). People taking digoxin, or with severe kidney or liver problems should speak to their doctor before taking vitamin D supplements.

What other sources of vitamin D are there?

Your skin makes vitamin D when exposed to sunlight. Other sources include foods such as tofu, fortified cereals, egg yolks, fatty fish, soy milk and red meat. It can still be difficult to get enough vitamin D from food alone.

Is it safe to take vitamin D if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Yes, as long as you take the dose advised. Your pregnancy supplements may already contain vitamin D, so check first.

I have dietary requirements, can I still take vitamin D supplements?

If buying supplements you will need to check at the time. Supplements might not be strictly vegan, [find out more here](#).

What about religious fasting such as Ramadan?

Vitamin D supplements are only taken once a day and the timing is not important, so there is no need to take them during the hours of fasting.

Where can I find more information about vitamin D?

The NHS website has a lot of information about vitamin D; [please follow this link advice](#).

Some of the messages and recommendations above will be familiar to many. Although some of the information alters slightly depending on demographics, the recommendations around a healthy lifestyle are consistent.

- Keeping to a **healthy body weight**
- Eating a **healthy diet** and staying hydrated
- Increasing **physical activity**

- Reducing **alcohol consumption**
- Not **smoking**
- Taking measures to control your **stress levels**

There has been a recent suggestion that people from a BAME background may be at a higher risk due to Covid-19. The reasons for these are still being researched and it may be in time to come that there are other factors contributing to this that come to light. It's now becoming clear that people with certain health conditions, such as diabetes, respiratory disease, heart disease and cancer are more likely to have severe symptoms and many of these conditions can be linked to diet and lifestyle.

Please consider changes to your lifestyle as a means of self-care during this time. While the links between a healthy lifestyle, health conditions and demographics are still being researched, the certainty is that these above recommendations still have a positive impact on physical and mental health so are still worth following.

You may have seen in recent weeks, the Trust has used its regular communications and **BCHFT Staff Space Facebook page** to put videos on to benefit staff health and wellbeing such as exercise sessions, yoga, mindfulness and other wellbeing videos. Please visit these and also consider signing up for a free **Vivup** account to also access the CBT Self-help guides, and have a look at our Covid-19 **Staff Wellbeing Guide**.

If you would like to discuss any health and wellbeing related issues, are unable to access any of the above videos/information, or to discuss if there are any lifestyle related support in the community, please contact the Workplace Wellbeing Co-ordinator Samuel Skelding on Samuel.skelding1@nhs.net