As the world attempts to get back to some normality after 3 months in lockdown, you’d expect everyone to be straight to the pub, going out for meals and socialising with friends. Why wouldn’t we when all these things have been taken away from us? Although this feeling is shared by some, there are others who may have found difficulties in adapting to the new changes that we are now living in. Although the Government have introduced some normality into our lives, this does not disregard the fact that we are still living in extremely uncertain times. This has caused a build-up of anxiety and fears for some, and as a young individual I can sympathise with these worries and concerns that others may be feeling. It is with no doubt that a large majority of society have built up fear and anxiety due to Covid-19, so now it’s time to challenge these fears head on!

As a 21-year-old graduating from University during a pandemic, lockdown has taken a hard hit on my social life and it has become the new “norm” to not see my friends regularly, not going out for meals or drinks, and not even going on holidays. This virus has put the whole world on pause, and the fear that has been implemented throughout the media has triggered many worries and concerns. However, the Government have announced that some activities and areas of hospitality can start to re-open, but this doesn’t quite look or feel the same as it was before. To be honest, it is like a military operation every time I leave the house - checking my bag for hand sanitiser for the 100th time, wiping down surfaces wherever I go, tentatively queuing outside the shop trying to make sure I am social distancing. Some of us forget (because you know, we are human) and then I must remind people around me to keep at least 1 metre apart. This leaves me feeling guilty and anxious in case I may have offended someone, so no wonder sometimes I think it’s easier to just stay indoors! But unfortunately this can become a vicious circle, and the more we avoid going out the more fear we build up which can quickly take over our lives.

So let’s start turning this mindset around by taking some small steps…

Yes, we can now meet with 6 people outdoors, but does this mean you have to do this? Although these guidelines have been put in place, we must all be aware that Covid-19 has not left us yet. So if you are feeling anxious or fearful, reduce the amount of people you meet with to one or two and remain distanced. This way has allowed me to socialise and catch up with my friends, but by doing so safely. This felt like a huge step towards tackling any fears or worries I had built up over lockdown, and I am positive this will become easier and more natural for me as time goes on.

Going to a pub or restaurant should be an enjoyable experience so if you are considering going to a public place of this nature, just remember to take the necessary precautions. I recently went for my first meal out in 4 months, but before I had felt anxious and nervous all day. I was even tempted to cancel last minute as I didn’t want to feel uncomfortable all night! However, I was pleasantly surprised by how safe the process was and this immediately settled and reassured my anxiety. All the tables and chairs were socially distanced, each customer was asked to sanitise their hands before entry and complete the NHS test and trace form, and all members of staff were wearing masks and the correct PPE. Don’t get me wrong, it did feel slightly strange, but I have accepted that this will be the “new normal” for now.

It is vital to remember that although we must keep ourselves and each other safe, it is extremely important we take time to improve and focus on our mental health and well-being. Whether this be by gradually starting to socialise with friends and family again, visiting public places such as restaurants and cafés or even just going out for the day to the beach! Keeping yourself busy and active will highlight the benefits for your mental health and well-being. Talking to someone is also vital in these current times, and although lockdown restrictions are easing, mental health charities and helplines are still active and accessible to the public. Whether that be for advice, support or even just a general chat – there is always someone with a listening ear!