

# Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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## KEY INSIGHTS

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Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research<sup>3</sup> undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

### Physical Well-being

Physical activity and exercise are good for improving well-being as they can have positive benefits for health, anxiety, and stress. As noted in the key insight on mental health, participants spoke of the well-being benefits of exercise during lockdown:

*...I've experienced down periods before and I know that getting out and going for a walk, or going outside, or doing yoga are very helpful things to me (MWB79).*

Similar sentiments were expressed for physical health and well-being:

*I had the surgery just before lockdown and it hasn't actually gone that well, it's taken me a long time to recover, so that had a big impact on how my lockdown went...I was very restricted...by this knee op not going well and so I can really only walk for about 10 minutes....So where I could actually go during lockdown was very restricted, [but] things improved for me vastly once I could go back to the swimming pool (MWB81).*

A common observation from participants was the increase in the number of people exercising over lockdown, and the amount of exercising people were doing:

*What has changed is that there are a lot more people walking up and down the beach in the neighbourhood where I live than I've ever seen in my 20 years of living here (MWB10).*

*I did even more biking than I usually do, so I'm a really keen commuter cyclist. I just love biking places and I did much more of that. And walking (MWB7).*

*Actually, one thing that has changed is that the kids are now accepting that a walk around the block is a doable thing. So before, like "oh, it's too far". Now they are used to it and know that they can do it (MWB13).*

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<sup>3</sup> A background and methodology report is available from [StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz](mailto:StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz)

Likewise, participants noted improvements in their diet, and the health benefits as a result:

*We couldn't do takeaways. It was hard to have shortcuts. So, I've become a bit more handy around the kitchen....And [I] possibly drink less because [I] got out of the habit of going to a friend's house for wine or going to the pub. And so, I think health-wise it's sort of improved my life (MWB2).*

However, this wasn't the case for everyone, with some participants noting that their physical health and well-being had decreased over, and since, lockdown:

*Physical well-being, we all got a bit podgy staying home. We went walking every day, but we all just ate a lot of baking....So, none of us have quite recovered from that yet. We're all finding that we got a bit lethargic. My husband's well-being has gone down. He's not sleeping very well at night and stuff like that (MWB55).*

*...before lockdown I was really fit, and I had, yeah, lost quite a bit of weight as well, and during lockdown I put a bit on, and then since lockdown ended, after going back to work, I've put on even more. So, that's disappointing (MWB74).*

A common theme from participants was that all the good exercise and diet practices developed over lockdown were not sustained once it ended:

*I would make sure I get out of the house once a day at least and go for a walk or a run and I actually got quite a lot fitter. And then when it came back out of lockdown again it was like oh, now I'm not getting the exercise that I was (MWB68).*

*...so, during lockdown there was obviously a lot more people out and about going for walks and that sort of thing, which was really cool. But then when lockdown ended that kind of just stopped and people got back into work and old working and life habits, sort of thing (MWB36).*

Lockdown highlighted the barriers to physical well-being for participants. A lack of walking and cycling infrastructure was regularly raised, as was needing better access to green spaces (see the key insight on urban green spaces). Participants particularly commented on the joys of cycling during lockdown, and how that ended with the return of cars to the road. However, the biggest issue raised was having an adequate work/life balance. Lockdown gave people the time and flexibility to incorporate exercise into their daily routine. While the majority of participants noted this had been lost due to people having to go back to their places of work, some have managed to hold on to this:

*Maybe it's time to pivot towards more, better infrastructure for walking and cycling (MWB7).*

*It really got me thinking, "It doesn't have to be such an unpleasant experience, biking, it could be really good if we just had a few less cars" (MWB79).*

*...my daughter-in-law still works from home. She's really appreciating not having to commute....She's got more time to go out and exercise, go for a walk before work, which she could not do if she was going into the city. I see huge benefits for that family. [And] people I swim with, a lot of them have remained working from home, and this means that they can go out into the sea for an hour, from 7:30 to 8:30 and then get home to be at their desk when they're required. So, they're getting their exercise in....[it] is instead of commuting [that] they can do this (MWB8).*