

# Tips from ITM staff for getting through a lockdown

Here we are again, since 2 November. Take care of yourselves!

12-11-20



Dit is de omschrijving

**18 March 2020. Belgium went in lockdown (for the first time) to halt the spread of the coronavirus. We stayed home, banned all but essential travel and generally put our life on hold. How did ITM staff and students experience this challenging period? And how did they look after themselves?**

## 1. Keeping in touch

As a PhD student at ITM, Kéfilath Bello comes to Belgium only occasionally. She works as a researcher at the Centre for Research in Human Reproduction and Demography (CERRHUD) in Benin, her home country. When Belgium went in lockdown, she was suddenly stranded here for far longer than anticipated. “When the borders closed, I felt rather upset because nobody could tell me when I would be able to return home. I ended up staying in Antwerp for four months instead of the two that I had planned. The only way I could deal with this situation was by keeping in touch with people at home.” I was glad that I could go to the office regularly. Some of my colleagues became good friends. However, once my workday finished, I longed for my family. We talked on WhatsApp, but long calls were too expensive. Luckily, my husband and three children were doing fine.”

## 2. Running in the woods

Philippe Selhorst is a member of ITM's Outbreak Research Team. As a virologist, he travels the world to crack the genetic code of viruses. For example, he helped decode the chikungunya virus in Congo, and the Zika virus in Cuba. “Before COVID-19, I had a similar work schedule. We work through evenings and weekends, even during small virus outbreaks. The lockdown actually took away my stress, because my social life came to a halt and I could fully focus on my lab work. I normally go rock climbing in my spare time, but during the lockdown I went running instead in the beautiful St. Annabos. Occasionally I met up with some good friends, while respecting the social distancing rules. And once I danced until the early hours of the morning during an online dance party!”

## 3. Online workout for a smooth transition

Shortly after the lockdown, Nandini Sarkar finished her PhD thesis on health care in rural Uganda. Her next ITM project was turned upside down. “Even before the lockdown I occasionally worked from home and I am lucky to have my own ‘office’ space there. However, things got really busy because my planned field work was cancelled. To keep my body and mind active, I started to exercise more. After a while, I liked it so much that I added an online cardio workout to my daily yoga session. During all these months at home the workout helped me structure my time and made for a smooth transition between my work and me-time.”