

# Coping with Isolation

Quarantining at home can play an important role in preventing the spread of infectious diseases. But this doesn't mean that coping with the disruption in your normal routine is easy. Taking care of your mental health is essential, even if your time in quarantine may seem relatively brief.

Feeling isolated can lead to poor sleep, poor cardiovascular health, lower immunity, depressive symptoms, and impaired executive function. When executive function skills are impaired, you may find it more difficult to focus, manage your emotions, remember information, and follow directions.

While quarantine may be only temporary, even brief periods of isolation and loneliness can have negative consequences on both physical and mental well-being.

As soon as you realise you may be positive or need to self-isolate, make an isolation pack. In this isolation pack, keep the following:

- Books/ magazines to read
- CDs to listen to, Movies to watch
- Snack packs to make you feel less dependant on others when you need to eat
- Activities you could do while in quarantine
- Online games
- Anything you may need to create a relaxing atmosphere
- Medication and list of medical personnel in the case of an emergency
- Computer and resources should you be working during this time

## Things You Can Do to Cope

The following are steps that may help counter some of the negative mental health effects of quarantine.

### Combat Frustration and Boredom

Some of the distress of being quarantined stems from boredom and frustration. Finding ways to stay occupied is important, so try to maintain as many of your routines as you can. Keep working on projects or find new activities to fill your time. Getting things done can provide a sense of purpose and competency. It gives you something to work towards and something to look forward to each day. So make a plan, list some things you'd like to accomplish, and then start checking a few things off your list when you feeling well enough to do so.

### Communicate

Staying in contact with other people not only staves off boredom, but it is also critical for minimizing the sense of isolation. Stay in touch with friends and family by phone and text. Reach out to others on social media. If possible, join a support group or discussion board specifically for people who are in quarantine. Talking to others who are going through the same thing can provide a sense of community and empowerment.

### Ideas for Staying Connected

- Check-in with friends and family each day by phone
- Use different forms of communication including phone, text, email, messaging, and videocall
- Try supporting others; reassure a friend who feeling stressed out or worried
- Use social networks gain support and stay connected

## Stay Informed, but Not Overwhelmed

People tend to experience greater anxiety when they feel like they don't have access to the information that they need. On the other hand, however, is the sense of panic that can stem from being immersed 24/7 in reports that focus on inaccurate or overly negative information. Rather than spend your time reading social media and chat forums, focus on getting helpful information from trusted sources. Sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), state and local health departments, and your doctor can all be helpful.

## Remember Why You're Doing This

When you are feeling frustrated or cooped up, it can be helpful to think about the reasons why you are quarantining yourself. If you have been potentially exposed to coronavirus, avoiding others is an altruistic action. You minimize the chance that you might unknowingly spread the illness to other people, even if you are currently asymptomatic.

By doing your part to prevent the spread of the disease, you are protecting others and making sure that those who are sick are able to have greater access to available health resources. Reminding yourself of these reasons can sometimes make your days in quarantine a little easier to bear.

## Financial Implications

Financial loss can be a problem during quarantine, with people unable to work and having to interrupt their professional activities with no advanced planning; the effects appear to be long lasting. During this time, if you don't have sufficient funds to meet all expenses, make contact with your debtors to arrange payment terms or allowances to pay when you back at work. Being ill

was not a choice you made so making plans to defer some financial responsibility will help you to focus on allowing your body to heal.

## Stigma

Stigma can hinder the healing process due to the immense psychological effects it may have. Infected persons encounter at times rejection from people in the community, having others treat them differently, not providing support, treating them with fear and suspicion, and making critical comments. People who stigmatise may have reasons for doing so, often stemming from a place of fear. Being stigmatized is not within your control, so focus your attention on what is within your control. Find healthy coping mechanisms such as breathing, exercise, mindfulness and similar activities to alleviate the anxiety you may feel through the stigma directed at you. Remember that this is an illness which can affect anyone and you are in no way to be blamed or to blame yourself for being infected.

There are a number of ways to support your mental health during periods of self-isolation or quarantine.

- Remind yourself that this is a temporary period of isolation to slow the spread of the virus.
- Remember that your effort is helping others in the community avoid contracting the virus.
- Stay connected with friends, family and colleagues via email, social media, video conferencing or telephone.
- Create a whatsapp support group for others in isolation
- Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.

- Keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy foods.
- Try to maintain some physical activity.
- Establish routines as best possible and try to view this period as a new experience that can bring health benefits.
- For those working from home, try to maintain a healthy balance by allocating specific work hours, taking regular breaks and, if possible, establishing a dedicated work space.
- Avoid news and social media if you find it distressing.