

Tips for you & your family to cope with home isolation

Times are very uncertain at the moment and many people are being asked to make lifestyle changes to help society work through COVID-19. For many of us, these changes include working from home and restricting the amount of time we spend socially interacting.

Social isolation can pose various challenges for our mental health. As social beings, we need social interaction and connectedness. Spending time isolated by ourselves limits the positive distractions available to us to dilute the amount of time we might stress over COVID-19.

Create “micro-lifts”

We start to miss “micro-lifts” or things that we normally have sprinkled throughout our day without even necessarily realising it. When you’re alone at home that doesn’t happen – and the cumulative effect of that can be significant, especially around the two week mark. So instead we need to create micro-lifts at home. Things that generates a sense of achievement. That might be a new exercise, learning a little bit of a language, talking to someone on FaceTime or joining a book group online.

Maintain a routine

Find yourself spending all day in your pyjamas or remembering at 3pm that you haven’t brushed your teeth had a shower because you knew you wouldn’t be seeing anyone? Although in the short term it can feel nice to be lazy, in the long term it isn’t going to be good for your mental wellbeing. As far as possible, try to maintain as much of a routine as you can. Wake up and go to bed at healthy times to ensure you get enough sleep.”

Avoid falling into a cycle of sleeping, working, eating, and repeating. Find some time to still have value to your day and do something fun for yourself (that isn’t just Netflix). We need to find ways to maintain our optimism for the future and minimise rumination and picking apart everything that is wrong with life. When we’re overwhelmed by a mundane life, it can quickly draw out the joy, so make fun for yourself.

Stay connected

If you feel that you’re beginning to struggle, take some time to call a friend or family member. Talk about how you’re feeling. If you don’t have anyone you can speak to you can call emotional support lines like LIFELINE. The WHO also recommends maintaining your social network during self-isolation. You can stay connected via email, social media, video conference and telephone.

Don't get drawn into a negative spiral

One of the most dangerous things for your mental health is having too much time to think about your life critically. When self-isolating we have a lot of time to think and it's very common to experience life dissatisfaction as a result. You can start off the process feeling calm and not "germaphobic" but over time, negative cognitive spirals can creep in. It will help to try and see it as a different period of time in your life, and not necessarily a bad one, even if you didn't choose it. It will mean a different rhythm of life, a chance to be in touch with others in different ways than usual.

Be aware of which elements of the situation you are concentrating on. Are you thinking about things you can control (problem-solving), or are you thinking about the elements out of your control (ruminative)? Problem-solving during times of uncertainty is important – it helps remind us of what we can control, not just what we can't.

Fact versus Story

Is it a fact you are telling yourself or a story? Under stress, our brains tend to make up negative stories about situations that fuel anxiety. Stories create feelings, and feelings drive actions and determine how we feel about life, ourselves, and others and where we put our energy. For most of us, the events and our stories become the same and our explanation becomes the truth of what happened. Our story does not belong to the event; our story belongs to us and we can modify it with curiosity and alternative explanations.

Below are some more tips to help you adjust to and remain mentally resilient during isolation:

- Talk to the other members of the family about COVID-19 to reduce anxiety.
- Seeking practical, credible information at specific times of the day.
- Reassure young children using age-appropriate language.
- Keep up a normal daily routine as much as possible.
- Ask your child's school to supply assignments, work sheets and homework by post or email.
- Think about how you have coped with difficult situations in the past and reassure yourself that you will cope with this situation too. Remember that isolation won't last forever.
- Exercise regularly at home. Options could include exercise DVDs or on-line programs, dancing, floor exercises, yoga, walking around the backyard or using home exercise equipment, such as a stationary bicycle, if you have it. Exercise is a proven treatment for stress and depression.
- Treat isolation as an opportunity to do some of those things you never usually have time for, such as board games, craft, drawing and reading.

- Don't just sit in front of a screen – vary your activities. The blue light from devices, like smartphones, can be disruptive to your sleep and overall wellbeing.

Distraction ideas

download podcasts
 watch box set DVDs
 do arts and crafts
 knit
 meditate
 bake
 exercise
 learn Yoga
 learn a new hobby
 Skype friends
 FaceTime calls
 write
 read books
 do DIY
 garden
 learn a new language
 play cards and board games
 de-clutter your space
 spring clean
 Netflix
 take virtual museum tours
 make a Wellness checklist
 create a Cooking Calendar
 do puzzles
 have conversations irl
 make a plan for how you can help your friends, neighbours, and people who are the most impacted
 do on-line courses
 clear out your wardrobe
 keep a Gratitude diary
 practice Mindfulness
 set goals for when this is all over

When this is over,
 may we never again
 take for granted
 A handshake with a stranger
 Full shelves at the store
 Conversations with neighbors
 A crowded theatre
 Friday night out
 The taste of communion
 A routine checkup
 The school rush each morning
 Coffee with a friend
 The stadium roaring
 Each deep breath
 A boring Tuesday
 Life itself.

When this ends,
 may we find
 that we have become
 more like the people
 we wanted to be
 we were called to be
 we hoped to be
 and may we stay
 that way—better
 for each other
 because of the worst.

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Emergency support

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call emergency services (triple zero - 000), contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information - 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on 000 (or 112 from a mobile phone)
- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467