

Self-Care During Quarantine or Self-Isolation

Being quarantined (or deciding to stay at home in self-isolation) for a lengthy period of time during an infectious disease outbreak is unavoidably stressful.

Anything you can do to reduce your sense of isolation, uncertainty, and boredom and provide some structure and routine to your days will help—both during your time isolated and afterwards.

This resource shares common reactions during quarantine and gives you tips on things you can do to stay resilient and manage stress and anxiety during this time.

Common reactions during quarantine

Here are some things people commonly experience during self-isolation or quarantine:

- Feeling more anxious, worried, and tense than normal.
- Feeling distracted, jittery, and unable to focus on anything very well, or for very long.
- Finding yourself thinking about the outbreak even when you are trying to focus on other things.
- Wanting to research and learn everything you can about the outbreak and what may unfold.
- Boredom and restlessness.
- Feeling disoriented and as if you're losing track of time.
- Feeling that life has slowed down and gotten "small". (On a positive note, people often also report that this time has helped them notice and appreciate the little things in life more, and that they have time to think about what's really important to them.)
- Difficulty sleeping well.
- Craving more of the unhealthy or dangerous things we can use to help ourselves cope with stress and tension (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes).
- Feeling nervous and reluctant to emerge from quarantine or self-isolation, go out in public again, and resume normal activities.

Staying healthy and resilient during quarantine

1. Prepare

- **Prepare for several weeks at home on a practical level.** Stock up on necessary food, medication, disinfectant, tissues, toilet paper, etc. You may also want to buy some new books and/or board games.

2. Remember

- **You have coped with difficult situations in the past.** You will be able to cope with this one, too.
- **This is temporary.** The quarantine will end and life will resume its normal pace in time.

3. Do these things

- **Connect with people you love.** You may not be able to see them physically, but you will likely be able to reach them by email, phone, or using video calling or voice messaging. Be proactive about reaching out to others to ask how they're doing or catch up with them. This is especially important if you live alone.
- **Create a routine and structure for your days.** Keep up a normal daily routine as much as possible. Decide how much time (if any) you're going to allocate to work, and when. Identify other things you want to do during your days, too, and list these out. Create a daily to-do list for yourself (and have family members, including children, create one, too.) Put some "productive" tasks on this list (such as work or cleaning the garage) and some "fun" tasks on there (such as spending extra time reading books or playing board games with the kids). Accomplishing the things on your list will give you a sense of structure, achievement, and control.
- **Get some regular exercise.** If you have exercise equipment in your home, use it. You can also access Pilates, yoga and workout routines online that are geared for all fitness levels and don't need any equipment. Put some form of exercise on your to-do list every day.
- **Do things around the house that you never seem to get around to.** Identify projects around the house you've been meaning to do. Now's the time to finally organize your sheets and towels, or the garage. Write all these projects down and start putting them on your daily to-do lists.
- **Do something for fun you normally don't make time for.** What is something you enjoy doing but normally don't make time for? Read a new book, watch a new TV series, play board games, etc. Put something enjoyable and fun on your to-do list every day.
- **Plan some time out from each other.** Make sure everyone gets the opportunity to spend some time alone (or, if you're home with young children, in smaller family groups.)
- **Get fresh air.** If you are fortunate enough to have a backyard, a deck, a balcony, or safe access to the outside world, use it. Spending time in nature is important to wellbeing, however, please continue to follow local health guidelines and advisories as it relates to distancing yourself from others in outdoor settings.
- **Take stock of any necessary items you may run out of during self-isolation or quarantine.** Particularly if you did not have long to prepare, you may run short on something you need (such as medication). Early during your time at home, review your supplies, make a note of anything you need, and make a plan to obtain that if possible.

- **Don't spend too much time watching the news or on social media.** News reports emphasizing the rapid spread of the outbreak and the lack of effective treatment will simply fuel anxiety and make you feel helpless. Spending too much time on social media can have a similar effect. Stick to 2-3 trusted sources of information about the outbreak.
- **Reach out for support.** Contact your organization's staff care program, your doctor, or other support professionals for support and advice.