

How To

Manage Anxiety & Stay Healthy During Social Isolation

We, as a nation, have entered an unprecedented and ambiguous state of being. Our world is dealing with a crisis that most of us alive today have not experienced in any way. We're concerned about safety, the economy and the toll of being in isolation for an unknown amount of time.



A pandemic is stressful for us as individuals and downright traumatic if you are a patient or frontline, essential worker. Below are some ways you can put into practice to help keep yourself healthy. It's important to remember that your mental health is also "health". Take care of it.

Although you may feel alone, remember that is your brain wishing for connection.



Predictability

Right now we are suffering from “lack of predictability” like many of us are used to. As such, it's vital that we organize our lives in as predictable a way as we can.

Structure

Build a schedule of the activities you can and are able to do.

Plan

Plan your day / week / month to overcome this sense of unpredictability

Calendar

Create a calendar. Look forward.

Forward

We need to have things that we look FORWARD to. Put yourself in a time frame. Schedule zoom meetings, facetime chats, dinner date nights with your spouse, family nights, etc.



If you are blessed to be able to work from home, it's helpful to separate your “work” space from your other living spaces.

Mobility

Many of us feel paralyzed or trapped. This creates feelings of stress and a sense of urgency to “fight or flee” (normal reaction to a stressful event). Unfortunately, because we are not able to “flee”, many will turn to “fighting” or bickering, conflict, etc.

We need to move. Our bodies require physical movement and if we do not move them, we may lose a physical sense of agency

Know Limits

Do whatever you can within the limits of your environment and within the regulations of your current State to stay as active as you physically can. Take walks, run, hike, where people are limited.



Explore Inside

Take care of your space (do small renovations, organization projects, cleaning, etc), workout (do this with a friend / family member over zoom) or do an online class, cook meals, etc.



Connection

We are hard-wired for connection so being in a state of isolation can feel intensely overwhelming and lonely. We need to feel seen and heard; being in synchrony with others shapes who we are and makes us feel alive. So, it's important for us to safely stay in contact with other humans as much as we can.

Of note, we need to not just hear voices, we need to see faces, look at and interact with others expressions; this helps us fully engage and feel seen. When we cry, we've been trained since birth that there will be a response, and when we laugh, someone is supposed to laugh with us. These are the rhythms of life by which we develop and sustain ourselves.



It's going to be easier for people who are in a loving relationships. If you are not in a relationship that is, please reach out to trusted people for support. If you feel unsafe, please call a crisis line as soon as you can (800-799-7233)



Safety

In situations that cause panic, anxiety or alarm, etc. it's normal to feel unsafe and worry that loved ones might not be as well.

Touch

The most fundamental element of safety is touch. Hold, squeeze, hug your loved ones as often as you can. Studies show that a hug lasting longer than 20 seconds releases a powerful hormone in the brain called oxytocin. This hormone is responsible for feelings of connectedness, love and well-being.

Talk

What else has made you feel safe in the past? What makes you feel calm? For some it can be prayer, meditation on scriptures, talking to a friend or loved one, etc.

Isolated?

If you are in a situation where you are isolating alone, it's harder to feel connectedness and safety. Please know that there are others that are supporting you and love you! Call a crisis hotline if you feel unsafe or text "HOME" to 741741.

Take Care

Those who may have previously experienced a situation that they considered traumatic, may feel especially unsafe inside their bodies and constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs. Please take special care.

Privacy

This is one thing many of us do not think is a need. However, it can be vital for many personalities. Everyone, at one point in time or another, needs the space to withdraw and feel solitude. If you are isolating with a big family or group of roommates etc, it can be hard to find a few moments to breathe or be alone with our thoughts.

If you're not able to move around as much, make sure your at least getting some vitamin D; sit by the window or step outside for at least ten minutes a day.



Diet and fluid intake are extremely important during times of increased stress. Make sure you're staying hydrated and eating nutritious foods.



Self-regulation

It's important to mention here that we need to practice being mindful of our emotions and how we let them affect us. When we face unprecedented situations, it's natural that we feel a rise in emotions but we need to be able to calm down our bodies, thoughts and physiological reactions for the safety of ourselves and others.

Crutches

There's a danger here of relying on substances, or endless TV, etc. to numb or space out instead of facing our feelings. In doing so, a sense of agency would unfortunately be lost. Other unhelpful strategies that people sometimes use include avoidance, suppression, and continued worrying.

Observe

Notice yourself. There will be a reaction but what is it? Are you angry, scared, etc?

Improve

If you don't notice yourself, you may be overly reactive. Once you observe, you start to make better, more intentional choices for yourself. It's helpful when we have others around as well to talk about how we feel.

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