

Surviving the New “Normal”

The world is experiencing a state of much uncertainty and very few people’s lives (if any) are not being impacted in some negative way. The majority of us are being ‘forced’ to self-quarantine, in hopes of slowing the growth of COVID-19, and self-quarantine coupled with the increased concerns and anxiety from the unknown can create significant detrimental impact to us both physically and psychologically. Spending time in quarantine can take a serious mental toll, frequently leaving people feeling like they have no control over the situation, and at extreme, feeling like they have no control over their lives. Additionally, many feel cut off from the rest of the world and unable to do their ‘normal’ daily duties.



Most schools have closed for the year, which means children are now home full time and as a result of the quarantine, they are unable to go out and play with friends. This adds additional stress to parents that are now working from home and attempting to create a productive work environment as well as structured routine to be able to continue to focus and perform at an optimal level. Parents are finding themselves having to not only entertain their children 24/7, but also some are now having to homeschool them as well. People might be feeling ‘cabin fever’ and the negative impact of family members being ‘forced’ to spend so much time together in a confined space.

Studies have shown that social isolation carries a number of health risks that can have long-term effects. Feeling isolated can lead to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Some may experience decreased or poor sleep, negative impact on cardiovascular health, lower immunity, and poor cognitive function. All this can lead to experiencing difficulty with focusing, memory issues, and feeling like you are on an emotional rollercoaster. As Individuals, we all react differently to situations at hand, however, how you deal with stress and quality of your

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coping mechanisms may determine the level of negative impact COVID-19 restrictions has on your physical and psychological wellbeing. Readjusting some of your current routines as well as the attitude you choose can make a big difference on how you “battle the current storm”. Although you may find yourself feeling like you have very little control of your life right now, you do in fact, still have the ability to connect with others as well as time to be productive and stay healthy. Following are some suggestions that may assist you in improving your current quality of life (psychological and physical).

One of the biggest changes many people are struggling with is that of restricted contact with others. For those introverts that are more comfortable in small groups or like being alone, this time of quarantine may have very little impact on them with regards to feeling alone and isolated. However, for much of the population, daily socializing is vital to keep them emotionally healthy and productive. These are the people that are feeling the biggest impact of the required “STAY AT HOME” requirements we are currently experiencing. No longer can we come and go as we please and visit with friends and/or relatives freely as we have become accustomed to doing. Lack of physical and social contact can lead to an increase in depression and anxiety: feelings of loneliness, sadness and fear. All of these reactions are quite normal under the current circumstances. However, there are steps you can take to protect your mental and physical wellbeing during this critical time. Luckily, most of us have computers and cell phones that allow us to communicate with others visually and audibly. Being able to do so certainly helps lessen those feelings of isolation. Many people have organized “social gatherings” via SKYPE or ZOOM or some other platform that allows for visual communication between individuals or groups from the comfort and safety of your home. Not only can these platforms be used to lessen the feelings of isolation, but they are also being used daily by people who have been forced to work from home that still need to be able to communicate with co-workers, business associates, clients, etc. Staying in contact with others via phone/computer/ visual platforms is crucial for minimizing the negative impact of isolation as well as allowing so many to continue doing their jobs, thus lessening the financial burden so many people and businesses are currently experiencing. These activities also allow people to continue to be productive and creative, and connected with community, which in turn, lessens the feelings of aloneness, boredom, depression and anxiety. Be aware to limit the amount of time you are spending on social media and watching the news, so as to mitigate the negative impact of the constant reports of COVID-19 and its impact. It is important to be aware and safe, but constant exposure to this information will only result in increased anxiety and possible depression.

Many people are struggling with feeling motivated and productive during this time of turmoil. Whether or not you are working from home, now more than ever, you should develop daily routines and make every effort to stick to those routines. The disruption of our daily routines as a result of the COVID-19 quarantine has left many feeling unmotivated and lacking direction. Over a period of time, this can leave someone feeling like they lack purpose, and thus they experience increased depression and anxiety. Additionally, lacking routine can also lead to increases in substance abuse or even relapse. Thus, it is very important to create structure with daily routines to which you strictly adhere. For those that are working from home, structure will lead to better focus and productivity as well as enable you to stay on task, especially when there are constant distractions from other family members (i.e.: children) that are also at home during the quarantine. Try to stick to your usual work times or something similar to

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keep you on track. Try to create daily routines for everyone in the house so that things stay as ‘normal’ as possible and you feel like there is movement in a positive direction (think about setting goals to attain and break them down into steps that you can take on a daily basis). Even if you have very few obligations, a daily routine will help you stay balanced and productive. Also try to create some space between those of you that are piled into one house. Take time to be alone as well as time to be together, which may be difficult to arrange under the circumstances but most beneficial for your psychological well being.

Included in your daily routine should be some type of exercise. Although gyms have been shut down throughout the country, you can still get a good workout by going outside and walking or jogging as well as using your own body weight to tax your muscles (think burpees, pushups, jumping jacks, squats, etc.). Even relatively short periods of physical activity can have a positive impact on your physical and mental wellbeing.

Studies have shown that even twenty minutes of exercise will lessen anxiety and depression. Exercise is a reset button in parts of the brain that result in lowering the level of anxiety and depression by creating chemical changes in the body; it turns off the fight or flight response and completes the circuit and resets. Additionally, it has been shown that as little as two weeks of inactivity could lead to reductions in muscle mass. Take advantage of the opportunity to get up, get out, and get going!

Another benefit of regular exercise is improved sleep. Try to keep a consistent sleep schedule; go to bed at the same time and wake up at the same time. By doing so, you will lower your level of anxiety, which for some, is currently extremely high due to the circumstances of feeling out of control of so much in our lives. Keeping a regular sleep schedule will also contribute to sticking with a routine, which is so important in helping one feel in control, especially at a time when we are feeling like there is so much that we cannot control.

In conclusion, focus on what you have control over (which will help lessen any anxiety you may be feeling), choose your attitude (which you ALWAYS have control over), stay positive, and embrace kindness.