



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

MANAGING THE EMOTIONAL IMPACTS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

As the coronavirus continues to spread and as the public practices social distancing, many are experiencing the realities of social isolation in an unprecedented way. Humans are inherently social creatures, and being cut off from others for long periods of time can increase feelings of loneliness and depression, especially for those with an underlying mental health diagnosis.

WAYS TO REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

While time to ourselves is necessary and can be a welcome break, a lengthy and externally imposed period alone can have significant impacts on our mental well-being. The current lack of certainty about when social distancing will end can also compound issues related to prolonged isolation.

Loneliness leads to a number of consequences. Research suggests that chronic loneliness can lead to sleep problems, a weakened immune system, feelings of depression or anxiety and other health complications. While taking steps to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, we must recognize that the consequences of social isolation and loneliness are vital concerns that many in our society are now facing.

Thankfully, in the digital age, there are a few things you can do to help yourself feel better while in quarantine at home.



Use technology. Staying in touch with loved ones can play a big role in feeling less isolated. Call or text loved ones who you cannot see in-person regularly. For those with a smartphone or a webcam, video call apps like Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime (iOS) or Google Duo (Android) can let you both see and hear whomever you're talking to. For those without Internet access, contact can still be maintained through phone calls and letter writing.

In addition to the above, there are games that can be played online or by way of smartphone applications with friends and other loved ones, such as versions of cherished board games.

Maintain a schedule. Long periods of time alone and indoors can lead to detrimental shifts in sleep patterns and everyday routine. Try to wake up at the same time every day and observe common hygiene rituals, such as getting out of pajamas and showering, even if you are not working from home.

Break up the day. Adhering to a regular schedule may not be enough to break up the monotony. Seek out a variety of activities to make the time feel more full and involved. Make time for exercise, restfulness and contact with others. Even your favored activities should be broken up at times, in order to keep them from getting dull.

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Engage in your hobbies. One positive of unlimited free time at home is the opportunity to catch up on things you enjoy. This could include reading books, streaming TV shows and movies or playing video games. For the artistically inclined, using a creative outlet to process your experience can help pass the time and provide a sense of accomplishment. Try some creative writing or writing in a journal to express yourself or record your thoughts during a powerful time in your life. Consider other artistic pursuits like painting, drawing, knitting, learning to play an instrument or writing a song.

Go outside and exercise, within reason. Medical experts have shared that it is still okay to spend time outside—so long as you are wearing a mask, practice social distancing and wash your hands with soap and water upon arriving home. Going for a jog, a bicycle ride, a hike or a walk alone or with a pet are all great ways to stay active.

Bodily health has mental benefits. If you do not feel able to go outside, physical activity is possible even in small spaces through slower-paced or low-impact activities like stretching and walking.

Remain centered. Try to maintain personal balance by continuing what physical and mental exercises you can, or adopt new ones. Moments of peace and mindfulness can be found in yoga and other practices. While it is not advisable to attend religious services due to the potential spread of the coronavirus in crowds and large gatherings, many places of worship are now offering online alternatives like live streaming or recordings.

Finding peace in simple moments like sitting with a cup of coffee or tea, gazing out the window or listening to some beautiful music can help you settle down.



Seek support. CancerCare continues to offer support services over the phone with a master's-prepared oncology social workers and through support groups on our website. If you already have a counselor or therapist who is supporting you, explore if they are able to provide online or telephone counseling in lieu of office visits while practicing social distancing. This can prevent unnecessary exposure while still allowing you to get the support you need.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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