

# Working Well: Stay home, stay healthy: tips for maintaining your psychological well-being during self-isolation

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The COVID-19 outbreak has led the Canadian government to require people to stay home whenever possible, and for those who've been potentially exposed to the virus, to self-quarantine. Read on for some tips for staying positive and psychologically well during this time.

What are some psychological reactions you might experience during self-isolation or quarantine? Research from the SARS outbreak in 2003 has shown that quarantine can, but not always, be unpleasant for those who undergo it. Negative psychological effects may include stress, fear, prolonged anxiety, insomnia, loneliness, confusion, frustration and anger.

- Anxiety caused by uncertainty over virus status can have strong impacts on psychological wellbeing.
- Self-isolation and quarantine may limit access to one's regular social support network, which is a significant buffer to stress. This can lead to feelings of social isolation and increased anxiety.
- Limited or restricted access to regular and reliable coping mechanisms, such as exercise, fresh air, and nature, as well as fun and uplifting activities, can make this time very difficult.
- Frustration or fear of financial loss is also a common emotion.
- Feelings of stigmatization can also increase stress and affect one's self-perception, having a significant effect on one's wellbeing.
- Fear of spreading the virus to one's partner and family members may lead to feelings of worry.
- Health care workers who have been quarantined may feel they are viewed as victims and vectors of the virus rather than healers.
- Health care workers who are particularly prone to stress symptoms include those who have had direct contact with patients who test positive for COVID-19 and parents.
- This can be a stressful time for anyone given the uncertainty and rapidly changing spread of the virus, and the constant news media coverage. People in quarantine may rely more on the news media for information, which may also heighten fears.

## Are these reactions "typical"?

Absolutely. These are typical reactions that some people experience when they are in when faced with these unusual situations.

## What can you do to manage possible impacts from quarantine or self-isolation?

- Know you're helping others - Keep in mind that by isolating or quarantining yourself, you are protecting others you care about, as well as being a good Samaritan for society as a whole. Voluntary self-isolation is an act of altruism for the benefit of people in your community.
- Coping with negative thoughts – Negative thoughts can be insistent and loud. Blocking negative thoughts all together may not work; however, interrupting the 'loop' is something you can do. When you notice the negative thoughts – acknowledge them for what they are, be OK with having the thought and then acknowledge that the thought will pass. Another way to interrupt the negative thought loop is to allow yourself a few minutes to have the thoughts and then engage in a distracting behaviour.
- Cognitive re-framing – Maintaining perspective, including positive thinking patterns and reframing frustrations into opportunities, may help elevate your mood. This time can be viewed as an opportunity to catch up with family, friends, or colleagues over the phone or video chat.
- Managing isolation or loneliness – Staying connected with others and using your support network is key during quarantine. Don't hesitate to reach out to those who are close to you, such as a friend, partner, or loved one. Let these people know how they can best support you during this challenging time.
- Hobbies – Having meaningful activities that provide value to yourself or others can be an effective way to make this time a positive experience. This gift of time is an opportunity to learn a new hobby. It is also a time to enjoy your favourite hobbies, such as reading a favourite book or magazine, writing in a journal, or catching up on your favourite movies and shows.
- Ensure you have adequate supplies – Having access to food and amenities you need while in quarantine will help to reduce anxiety and provide you with a sense of assurance.
- Rely on personal comforts – Creating a list of items, including favourite food items, that friends or family could get for you can go a long way in boosting your mood and reducing anxiety.
- Self-care & healthy habits – This is an important time to take care of yourself and engage in healthy habits including physical activity, meditating, eating healthy, and maintaining good sleep hygiene. These daily habits can go a long way toward staying resilient and having a positive outlook.

- Breathing – Irregular breathing or short inhaling can deprive our brain and body of oxygen. Taking 3 deep breathes can provide some immediate relief, and can remind us to breathe deeply more regularly.
- Meditation - Meditation is also a way to improve breathing and reduce anxiety. There are many guided meditation apps that you can download for free or a small fee.

### **What should you do if you're experiencing overwhelming thoughts or feelings?**

**If you find you are experiencing distressing thoughts or feeling lonely or down, don't hesitate to utilize the resources below:**

- PHSA's [Employee & Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#), Homewood Health: 1-800-663-1142 or [www.homeweb.ca](http://www.homeweb.ca) Homewood Health offers free and confidential coaching and counselling services for staff in quarantine through video counselling, phone, private online chat, or private messaging.
- PHSA's Workplace Wellness [Psychosocial Support Services](#) line: 604-875-2982 or email: [workplacewellness@cw.bc.ca](mailto:workplacewellness@cw.bc.ca). Reach out for a confidential, supportive conversation that can be helpful in exploring coping strategies related to unique and common experiences related to coping with COVID-19. The staff supporters are PHSA staff members who are trained professionals with backgrounds in psychology, counselling, social work and psychiatry.
- PHSA's [Workplace Wellness](#) website has a list of self-care strategies from meditation to virtual yoga.
- [Anxiety Canada' free online resources](#): For those experiencing persistent stress or heightened anxiety, Anxiety Canada has many free downloadable resources.

*Reference: Brooks, S., Webster, R., Smith, L., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenburg, N., et al. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. The Lancet, volume 395, issue 10227, (912-920). Retrieved from: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30460-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30460-8/fulltext)*

*PHSA's Psychological Health and Safety team supports the mental health of all employees in any PHSA program, service, or division. To learn more about the programs and services available to staff, visit us on [POD](#) or at [PHSA.ca](#). Questions? Email [healthpromotion@phsa.ca](mailto:healthpromotion@phsa.ca).*