

## 12 Ways To Ease Isolation While Practicing Social Distancing

**To avoid the coronavirus, public health experts advise people of all ages to stay home and practice social distancing as much as possible. This is particularly true for older adults and those with chronic medical conditions.**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), those actions will go a long way to helping limit the spread of the virus and its impact on our health as well as on our health care systems.

But social distancing and staying home may put some at greater risk for the unintended consequence of social isolation, a health concern that can be avoided or reduced with proper, proactive steps.

According to the National Institute on Aging, social isolation and loneliness are linked to higher risks for a variety of health problems. These include high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death. Social isolation can be harmful to your health and contribute to poor health outcomes, especially for older adults.

### **These steps can help you stay connected with others and prevent loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic.**

#### **Identify your vital connections.**

These are the people that you view as essential to your health, well-being, and quality of life. They can be friends, neighbors, and family. Your healthcare professionals may also be important to add to this list, but remember that they may be particularly busy. They also may want you to avoid their offices as much as possible to reduce your risks of getting sick. Therefore, you should consider contacting them by phone as much as you can and only when needed.

#### **Get everyone's contact information.**

Gather your connections' phone numbers, mailing addresses, and email addresses. This makes it easy to stay in touch regularly with the people you care about by phone, email—and yes, even writing old-fashioned letters. Set up times to call friends and family and make staying in touch with each other a priority while you're stuck at home.

**Try to have up-to-date communications equipment.**

If you have a cell phone, consider using FaceTime or Skype rather than just calling. Being able to see people's faces can make you feel more connected. If you have a computer or tablet, you can join online groups of people who share your interests. You may also consider setting up a schedule for when you'll connect with friends and family to create a routine (and something to look forward to).

**Get outside.**

Social distancing doesn't mean you have to stay inside. Take a walk, sit on the porch, wave to your neighbors. This is the perfect time to clean up your garden and to plant seeds.

**Stay as physically active as possible.**

You can find many different fitness programs online. Find some excellent suggestions from the National Institute on Aging:

**<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity>**

**Get creative!**

Some people are enjoying virtual dinners with each other. They use FaceTime or Zoom (a free app that allows you to connect several people to a video conference). Or talk to friends about reading the same book or watching the same movie so you can chat about it in a group later. Also, this is a great time to practice your favorite crafts, such as needlework, scrapbooking, knitting, or crocheting. Engaging in creative activities can help prevent feelings of loneliness.

**Educate yourself about your local healthcare options.**

Find out now how your healthcare providers are taking care of their patients, and what to do if you need a COVID-19 test. You may be able to get a telephone or online health visit, get a test at a drive-through facility, or email your provider with questions.

**Upgrade your basic self-care habits.**

This is a time to make sure you're eating well. Try to get to bed and wake up at the same time every day and do your best to stay active. Even a walk around the block is helpful.

**Keep in touch with people in long-term care.**

If you care for someone in long-term care, ask the staff if you can email pictures or letters that can be printed out and "delivered" to them. Consider asking the staff to help you FaceTime with them as well.

**Deal with caregiver isolation.**

Caregiving itself can be isolating and practicing social distancing can make you feel even more alone. Try connecting with other caregivers through virtual support groups online. Some are specific for caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease or other illnesses.

**Try to dial down the bad news.**

Too much bad news can overwhelm your emotions. Consider tuning in just once or twice a day for only 10 or 15 minutes. Then turn off the news and focus on activities that help you stay happy and positive.

**Call a hotline if you need someone to talk to about how you're feeling.**

If you are feeling overwhelmed, the CDC recommends using the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline:**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

**Phone:** 1-800-985-5990

**Text:** text **TalkWithUs** to **66746**.

**TTY:** 1-800-846-8517

If you feel like you want to harm yourself or others, call 911.