

20 Strategies to Cope with Home Isolation in the COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Maintain a consistent routine

Ensure that you regularly eat breakfast and lunch at appropriate times, schedule downtime regularly, complete hygiene tasks and do the things you would otherwise do (that are feasible) at the times you would do them were you not in isolation.



2. Emphasize your sleep hygiene



Ensure that you maintain between 7-9 hours each night, avoid napping for long periods throughout the day, set an alarm to both go to bed and to wake up each morning and seek morning daylight/avoid bright lights at the beginning/end of the day. It is also advisable to avoid caffeine and alcohol after 3pm.

Those with apps may monitor their sleep patterns to be further informed. Most iPhones have in built apps for this in their settings.

3. Get creative with your physical activity

It is vital to remain as active as possible. This may be in the form of apps (Under Armor, Nike training etc.) for physical exercise or Yoga/Pilates or YouTube tutorials. Simple exercises such as push-ups, sit-ups, walking in backyards (if appropriate) and stretching are recommended. Those isolated should schedule in activity at a particular time each day and avoid being sedentary.



4. Healthy usage of social media/technology



Whilst social media can be a tool to connect and stay informed it is important to set limits and to avoid becoming obsessive due to its accessibility whilst isolated.

This may include periods of time in which you turn the TV off or put your phone in another room for a designated period of time whilst engaging in other activities. You can also set limits on screen usage via apps that monitor this or the "screen time" function in your settings. Temporarily deleting apps like Facebook/Instagram for periods of time or only accessing them via a computer is recommended.

5. Check in with others

As the pandemic progresses it is expected that many others may be in similar situations to yourself and it is important to check in with them



regularly to maintain connection. This may be via regular phone calls or Facetime calls or email/texts. This is especially important for the elderly or those with pre-existing physical issues. It may be advisable to write them a letter which may be more heartfelt and sincere.

6. Healthy diet



Ensure that despite the current limitations you eat a healthy, well balanced diet including meat, fruit and vegetables. There is the current temptation to rely on Uber Eats or takeaway apps and whilst this may still be something you eat more of given the circumstances it's recommended you still cook healthy meals and don't overcompensate with portion sizes. Some people binge eat as a means of coping and it's important to monitor in case you're developing as a maladaptive coping mechanism.

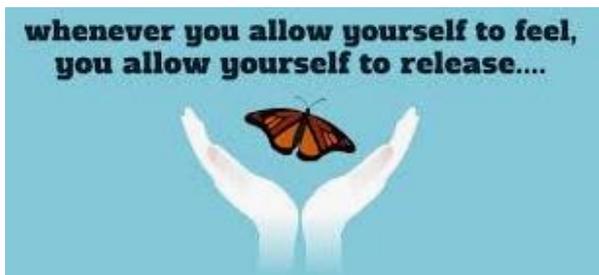
7. Rely on reliable sources of information

Whilst it is important to moderate your usage of technology it is still important to be well informed. Keep an eye out for government press conferences from the PM or medical professionals and rely on organizations such as Hunter New England Health or the World Health Organization. Following these organizations on social media remains an option. Disinformation can be rife on social media and it is crucial to fact-check sources of information and not contribute to further panic and anxiety by sharing or disseminating things that aren't credible.



8. Allow yourself to feel

It is vital that you give yourself the opportunity to properly process and unpack your own emotions and thoughts with relation to the pandemic. This will reduce the likelihood of denial, avoidance or panic and can help you to sit as comfortably as possible with uncertainty and painful emotions, always a useful skill. It may be helpful to schedule in times throughout the day (driving, in the shower etc.) in which you allow yourself to worry, a natural experience given the current circumstances. It is recommended however that this is not done too close to bedtime.



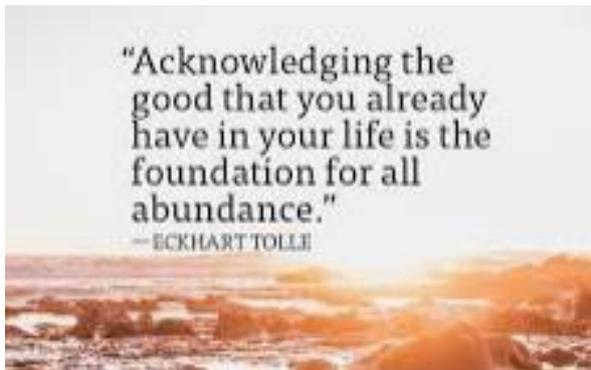
9. Get creative

The current situation may provide you with an opportunity to explore a creative side of yourself. Examples may include writing or blogging, drawing/painting/sketching, writing letters to others, learning a new language or expressing yourself in different ways. Pinterest, YouTube or creative writing apps may help to spark new ideas.



10. Practice gratitude

Instead of consciously focusing on what you feel you have lost or don't



have, focus on the things you do have. Practicing gratitude can look like scheduling time in each day to reflect on what you are grateful for and what you have, ensuring that you are genuine whilst doing so. Journaling in a phone/notebook

can be an effective way to stay focused on gratitude and can enhance empathy/compassion for self and others. You may then share your gratitude with others which can foster more genuine connection and provide support to those who may be struggling.

11. Mindfulness

Scheduling time in each day to practice mindfulness can certainly be helpful. Mindfulness refers to focusing your



conscious attention on the here and now and using all your sensory experiences to be present in the current moment. It can be practiced by noticing your surroundings, including your thoughts and feelings, without judgement. Examples can include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, the "five senses game" (name five things you can see, hear, smell, touch, taste or feel) or grounding techniques. The app "Calm Harm" (whilst more focused on self-harm) provides hundreds of different grounding or mindfulness techniques to better connect people with the present.

12. Focus on your own appearance/presentation



Whilst it may be tempting to stay in your pyjamas all day it is important this is avoided. If you regularly shave in the morning, do your make up, wear business clothes, pack a lunch, do some exercise etc. it is advisable to maintain this routine to ensure that you continue to convince yourself to maintain some normality and consistency. At the end of the "working day" you can then move into regular post-work pastimes and routines that still meet quarantine criteria.

13. Practice radical acceptance

This technique requires you to simply acknowledge your present situation without judgement, criticism or emotionality.

An emphasis on the fact that you have limited control over what is

happening in the wider world is key as attempting to fight or deny your current circumstances only leads to further pain and suffering. Radical acceptance means looking at yourself and the situation as it actually is rather than how you feel it "should" be. Keep in mind that radical acceptance does not mean that you condone or agree with bad behaviour in others or minimise painful experiences. What it does mean is that you stop trying to change what's happened by getting angry and blaming the situation and accept your current circumstances as your reality (for interested clients I have further content on this).



14. Practice rational/reasonable thinking



Whilst anxiety is a completely rational response given the current circumstances in the world, if unchecked such anxiety can lead to the formation of irrational and unhelpful thinking patterns. It is important to recognize "worst case scenario"

thinking and "catastrophizing" to ensure that we then restructure these thoughts with more rational, evidence based alternatives.

Examples of coping statements for the current situation may include;

- 80% of infections are mild and asymptomatic
- The expertise of many top professionals across the world is being used to better the outcomes for all of us
- The timing of our outbreak means we can learn from other countries and minimize harm
- The world has been planning for issues like this since the SARS virus in 2003
- Life will be disrupted for a while and it will be challenging but this will eventually pass
- We are all in this together
- All I can control is my own hygiene and the practice of social distancing
- What can I do for others?

15. Recognize your own unhelpful ways of coping

When we are distressed and overwhelmed, we often respond in ways that aren't helpful. These behaviours can become reinforced over time and it is important to know how you respond and ensure that you avoid negative coping mechanisms. Examples can include self-medication with drugs and alcohol, anger and irritability, withdrawal and social isolation, blaming/denial, overcompensating, avoidance, binge eating, restriction in eating etc. Any of the aforementioned responses would be better practiced than these unhelpful coping styles.



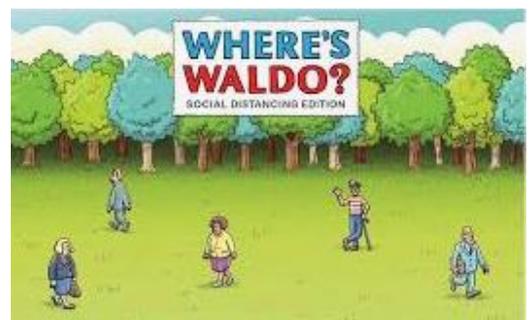
16. Write a list of all the things you've previously convinced yourself you "don't have time for"

**LIST OF THINGS
AIN'T NOBODY
GOT TIME FOR.
1. THAT**

Gradually you can schedule time in to complete these tasks or formulate a plan, it may be re-arranging furniture or space in a room, writing something creative, organizing something, cleaning/culling items etc. If you put your mind to it you can use the extra time you have homebound to take meaningful action and do something purposeful that you've put on the "backburner" for long periods due to how busy you've been.

17. Actively practicing social distancing and good hygiene

By doing what health experts recommend you do to combat spread of COVID-19 it can act as your own way of maintaining some control. For those unaware Google has released a website dedicated to hygiene advice to contain the impact of COVID-19. It also models to others the appropriate way to be acting and can help to change their own behaviours.



18. Engage (in moderation) in gaming, movies, podcasts, TV shows, books etc

Create a list of movies/TV shows/podcasts you've always wanted to watch or listen to and gradually schedule in time to do so. Such use of technology can act as an appropriate way to escape temporarily from reality and focus your attention on something different, rather than fixating on current world events and stoking negative emotions.



19. Switch off

Put the phone down, turn the TV off and turn the music down which can allow you to sit comfortably with your thoughts/feelings. It is important to still process what happening within yourself, and schedule time for introspection. This can provide you with more control and allow you to better self-regulate. Doing so in nature if possible may be advisable.



20. Find things to laugh at

Humour can still be found in such trying circumstances, it may just be a little harder to find. It is important to ensure you are doing/watching/creating things that make you laugh and contribute to the joy of others.

