

Coping with Social Isolation

Warmer weather and the ability to be outside gave a brief respite from some of the pandemic's most difficult restrictions. Being able to exercise, spend time outside, and even visit with friends and family in a socially distanced way has made it easier for many people to cope with the loss of travel and favorite leisure activities.

As the days grow shorter and the potential for COVID-19 cases increases, many of us will have to return to social distancing and sheltering in place. Common reactions to social isolation include restlessness or agitation, disturbed sleep, anxiety, anger, boredom, irritability, and loneliness.

If you're worried about another prolonged separation from friends and loved ones, these coping strategies may help:

- ▶ **Create a routine.** Having a regular schedule of activities creates structure and purpose. Studies show that predictable routines lower anxiety.
- ▶ **Tackle projects.** Doing something productive increases our feelings of personal power, restoring a sense of control during a time of uncertainty. Clearing clutter or simple home improvement projects are a great way to freshen up your living space and reduce feelings of cabin fever.
- ▶ **Exercise.** Even short bursts of exercise positively impacts mood. If you can't exercise outside, try stretching, climbing stairs, doing push-ups, or finding an online exercise routine.



- ▶ **Play games.** Video and board games help pass the time. Gaming with others, whether in person or online, reduces feelings of isolation.
- ▶ **Go outside.** Just 10 minutes a day will increase the amount of serotonin and dopamine (both "feel good" chemicals) in the brain. Remember, even when you can't see the sun, its light is filtering through the clouds and providing you with needed vitamin D. If you suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, consider using a therapeutic light box for 20-30 minutes a day.
- ▶ **Learn.** Take an online course or focus on a creative project. Learning forces us to be mindful and engage with the present moment, and may be a good antidote to feelings of anxiety or stress.
- ▶ **Connect.** Social isolation increases feelings of loneliness, especially in the elderly. Consider creating a cold-weather gathering place with an outdoor heater and sufficient space for social distancing. If this isn't possible, stay in touch via phone, video call, and email or letter.

If you are worried that you may struggle with another period of social isolation, LifeMatters can help. Call 24/7/365.

Call **LifeMatters®** by Empathia toll-free anytime. **1-800-367-7474**

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