

SOCIAL DISTANCING, HOME SECLUSION AND LONELINESS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

With the rapid spread of the coronavirus worldwide, and the subsequent escalation of the outbreak to the status of pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), governments and health regulatory agencies across the globe have taken more drastic measures as an attempt to slow down virus dissemination, including travel bans, school shutdowns, quarantines, home seclusions and overall social distancing.¹

The idea is that, by staying physically distant from others, one would prevent cross transmission of the virus.²

We are now left with the following challenge:

How do we adjust to social distancing without letting it progress to social isolation and subsequent feeling of loneliness and depression?

During the so-called 'social distancing' period, despite the required physical distance, we all need to be mindful about keeping important psychosocial principles, including hope, safety, serenity, and social connectedness, which are crucial to maintain emotional wellbeing.

Social distancing should not lead necessarily to social isolation or to the detrimental feeling of loneliness, which has already become a problem in modern society, and has been linked to higher risk of depression, cardiac problems and even death.³

There is a biological need for social closeness based on neurochemical and immunological factors that work collaboratively, and will even help us fight infections and will protect our brain from feelings of anxiety and depression.

In this paradoxical reality where the world is uninterruptedly connected through internet, cameras, text messages, phone calls and social media galore, many of us still feel lonely, a feeling that can be exacerbated during this time of outbreak. If used wisely though, those resources can promote the right amount of social connectedness required for us to maintain our health.

It is understandable that we are all different when it comes to socialization, interpersonal skills and overall daily habits. However, the following are valuable ideas that could help promote wellbeing through social connectivity during quarantine time:

- **Live workout classes:** taking care of your physical health by exercising regularly will help you get through this time "in a much better shape" and will certainly make you feel better

- **FaceTime, phone or WhatsApp call with friends and family:** even a quick hello to those you care about will stimulate those nice endorphins that promote wellbeing.
- **Use of social media for group discussion and live chatting:** put your thoughts out there with a message of hope and care for others; the world will appreciate it and you will benefit from the positive impact your words will have in the life of others!
- **Collaborative gaming though the internet:** it's just pure fun!
- **Long distance courses and classes:** languages, art, music, etc. There are a variety of options online, and while self-guided apps and recorded videos can be fun and useful too, we are focusing here on human interactions, therefore a person-to-person interface would be ideal.

Furthermore, let's be mindful that because social networks tend to get smaller with age, the prevalence of loneliness is estimated to increase with increased population aging.⁴

As we know, older adults are in general more vulnerable, especially now during the COVID-19 outbreak, and it is important to understand our important role on reaching out to people in need as their isolation can have serious repercussions.

The message is: let's stay safe, respecting recommendations of social distancing, but let's stay connected and therefore healthy! Together, we will win this battle.

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References

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