

## Taking control of the seemingly uncontrollable: Preserving both your physical and mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak

---

**This is not the time to panic or catastrophise.**

**It's the time to take PROACTIVE ACTION to protect yourself and your community.**

It's time to focus on **what you can do and control**. It's time to stop fighting or resisting the things you cannot control. Everything you do (or don't do) now will affect your **probability (chances)** of infection and/or infecting others.

**People are generally worrying about 5 things:**

1. What are my chances of being exposed?
2. If exposed, what are my chances of being infected?
3. If exposed or infected, what are my chances of infecting others (those in my home)?
4. If I get the disease, what are my chances of needing hospital care?
5. If I need hospital care, what are my chances of needing critical care or dying?

There is a lot you can do to prevent exposure and infection.

**This is the purpose of social isolation or distancing.**

**According to the data...**

**80%** of people who are infected will experience mild symptoms of the flu and require no medical or hospital care. **Worst-case scenario:** you get infected, you will have a bad flu and feel bad for a few weeks, but you will recover. This is what most people should expect and only as a worst-case scenario! For this to happen, you have to be exposed and become infected.

**20%** of people may require some form of medical or hospital care. Those most likely to need this are the **elderly** and those with **preexisting medical conditions** and those who are **immunocompromised**. These conditions include:

- heart and lung disease (asthma, COPD)
- uncontrolled diabetes
- hypertension
- cancer
- autoimmune diseases (such as rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease)

Keep in mind that **20% of a population**, in a short period of time, **is a lot of people**. **This is why we need to act now: to protect our communities. These are the people our self-isolation and social distancing is designed to protect the most.**

## What is self-isolation and social distancing?

### 1. Social distancing

“Social distancing” means avoiding situations where you could come into contact with others who may be infected or where you could infect other people by not knowing you have been infected. This helps prevent the rate of infection. Concretely, this means avoiding all activities that involve the potential of coming into close contact with others. This includes:

- Going to work, school, university
- Using public transport (bus, taxi/Uber, train, plane)
- Visiting healthcare facilities
- Attending faith-based activities (church, synagogue, mosque)
- Going to stores and malls (ask if you can get things delivered to you)
- Attending all public events (sports, festivals, conferences, concerts, etc.)
- Attending personal gatherings (dinners, parties, playdates)

### 2. Self-isolation

“Self-isolation” is a more stringent form of social distancing reserved for those who are infected or suspect infection (such as those returning from travel). Unlike social distancing, self-isolation means limiting your contact with those who live with you, are close with you, or live near you (friends, relatives, neighbors) that may not have travelled or been infected. This may be particularly **important if a loved one is at high risk** (such as the elderly and those with preexisting health conditions).

### How can you achieve self-isolation from your loved ones in your home?

You may decide to:

- Restrict your access to certain parts of your home (rooms or floors)
- Use a separate bathroom as others in your home
- If you must share a bathroom, hand wash and consider disinfecting surfaces
- Have loved ones prepare your food and “deliver” it to your own space in the home
- Limit your movement throughout the house

### Self-isolation also includes self-monitoring your symptoms:

- Monitor yourself for cough or shortness of breath
- Take your temperature twice a day (with a digital thermometer).
  - Ensure you don't eat or drink 30 mins before
  - Avoid pain and fever relievers
  - You have a fever if your temperature reaches 38°C or 100.4°F

## Keep in mind!

**These measures, though they seem drastic, are only temporary!**

If you practice self-isolation for 2 weeks without developing symptoms, you can **safely and confidently** rejoin the rest of your family members.

### If you develop symptoms

- Contact your local health authorities immediately
- Follow their instructions
- Maintain self-isolation measures

## How to practice social distancing and self-isolation

If you are **self-isolating** (and show no symptoms):

Simply stay **at least one metre away** from others. Feel free to go for walks, runs, drives (assuming you drive alone), do some gardening, etc. However, **it is recommended that you stay home for 14 days to determine if symptoms develop**. If they do, you should call your local health authority for instructions on where to go for testing or treatment.

If you are practicing **social distancing**:

You are not confined to the home! Feel free to take your loved ones or kids for walks, to the park, for a drive, on a hike. You can go to the grocery store or pharmacy outside of peak hours, just keep at **least one metre away** from others.

Use this time to play, garden, clean out the garage... there are so many things you can still do in addition to all the things you can do inside. See the last page for **Tips on Taking Control and Taking Advantage of this Time**

### 3. Managing Stress During Times of Uncertainty

When there is uncertainty, there is **increased anxiety and worry**. This is the mind's attempt to "figure out" how to avoid uncertainty or reduce the chances of "bad things" happening. This is normal, but **counterproductive**.

Worrying (which is entirely cognitive, meaning "in your head") is more likely to lead to indecisiveness and inaction than action. You don't need to be worried to make decisions about taking constructive action. Instead, **ACTIVELY DECIDE** to follow directives to stay home, practice social distancing, wash your hands often, and encourage others to do the same. **This is the most sensible thing you can do right now to protect yourself, your loved ones and the community.**

Whether they are self-isolating or social distancing (or not), it is likely that **people will be feeling a mix of emotions** including:

- **Anxiety**
- **Worry**
- **Fear**
- **Frustration**
- **Disappointment**
- **Sadness or Loneliness** from having to cancel important events

#### These feelings are completely normal.

However, how we feel is directly tied to how we think and "talk to ourselves" about what is going on. Here are some tips for **preserving and optimizing your mental health** during this time:

#### **KEEP A JOURNAL**

Write down your thoughts and feelings, especially if you are isolated or live alone. This will help you express your feelings and get them out. Then use your journal to read over your thoughts to check if you are exhibiting any **distorted** or **dysfunctional** thoughts:

**Distorted thoughts** are unrealistic or highly improbable thoughts. They tend to increase stress and anxiety. They include **catastrophising** the situation, such as "*I will be stuck in my house forever*" or "*we are all going to get infected and die!*").

Remember that these thoughts are completely unrealistic and highly improbable given all the objective scientific data. Instead, replace these thoughts with more realistic (less catastrophic ones) like: "*Just about everyone in the world is being asked to do their part to stay safe, so I am just doing my part. It's just 2 weeks... I am going to try to make the most of this time!*"

**Dysfunctional thoughts** are not necessarily unrealistic, but they are counterproductive. For example: *"I really hate being cooped up. I had so many cool things planned that I have to cancel. I am so upset! Now I will have to wait another year to go on my trip!"* These thoughts are not necessarily unrealistic but dwelling on all the negatives is not going to help you cope well with this situation. Instead, focus on all that there is to be grateful for!

## **FOCUS ON WHAT WE KNOW AND HOW YOU CAN USE THAT INFORMATION**

Rather than focus on all the questions or all the things we don't know or control, focus on what we do know and what you can control:

**For information**, consult reputable websites for updates on the spread of the virus in your area (like the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the American Center for Disease Control (CDC). **Don't panic!** USE that information to make informed decisions about YOUR ACTIONS, which are entirely within your control.

## **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL**

Perceiving a "lack of control" can produce a great deal of anxiety and worry. The antidote: focus your thoughts and actions on all the things you **CAN CONTROL**. Here are things we can all control right now:

### **YOUR THOUGHTS**

Your thoughts include how you are talking to yourself about this health situation, including your choice of words, calling it a "situation" versus a "crisis" (which might raise panic levels).

Remind yourself that **you are not alone** (even if you are alone at home). The whole world is being asked to stay home. **We are all home alone together**, and collectively. We are all doing something powerful to reduce the spread of the virus. Tell yourself that your **decision to stay home and social distance is saving lives**.

### **YOUR ACTIONS**

Everything you do now is within your control. Technically, you're the one choosing whether to respect the health authority directives or not (though the consequences of not doing so might far outweigh the temporary inconvenience).

## Tips on Taking Control and Taking Advantage of this Time

**TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS TIME!** Catch up on your reading, binge on Netflix (with no guilt!), start your spring cleaning, work on your taxes, start an art project, cook, take an online course (many are free!), spend some extra quality time with your kids (assuming you are not isolating yourself from them), meditate (deep breathing exercises can really help calm anxiety) or practice yoga, exercise, and so much more! Be creative!

## STAY CONNECTED

If you are feeling **socially isolated or lonely (or you have a friend or loved one who is socially isolating)**, you can re-connect and stay in touch by:

- Calling them
- Emailing or texting them
- Using online apps like Skype, Messenger, WhatsApp or Zoom to chat or conference
- Start an online blog to stay in touch with others in your community

For those with **preexisting mental health issues**, or for those who are really struggling emotionally (experiencing severe anxiety or worry, enough to cause panic or “worry” attacks that affect appetite and sleep or any aspect general functioning), it is important that you:

- Reach out to friends and loved ones for help or support
- Keep taking any medications you may be on
- Remain in contact with your mental health professional, if you have one (many mental health professionals are continuing to see low risk patients or are doing online sessions to stay in touch with patients during this time)
- If you have a **mental health emergency** (e.g., feel like you may be an imminent danger to yourself or others or experience any form of acute psychosis), you should call your health care provider (GP or mental health professional) immediately, or present to your local **psychiatric emergency department** (NOT general emergency department).
- If you do not have a psychiatric hospital in your area, call 911 and follow their instructions. They will direct you to the safest hospital.

## READ MORE

[https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/factsheets/coronavirus\\_selfisolation.pdf](https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/factsheets/coronavirus_selfisolation.pdf)  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/2019-novel-coronavirus-information-sheet.html#pha>