# How to safeguard your mental health while quarantined

More people are being exposed to infection as the number of COVID-19 cases continue to grow, resulting in an increased need for quarantines. The fear, stress and stigma associated with being quarantined can be damaging to one's mental health.

**The differences between isolation, quarantine and social distancing**
The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines medical isolation, quarantine and social distancing as follows:

> **Isolation** – The separation of a person or group of people <u>confirmed or suspected to be infected</u> with COVID-19, and potentially infectious, from those who are not infected. This can prevent spread of the virus. Isolation for public health purposes may be voluntary or compelled by federal, state, or local public health order.

> **Quarantine** – The separation of <u>individuals who have had close contact with a COVID-19 case</u>, but are not showing symptoms, to determine whether they develop symptoms of the disease. This keeps the person from potentially spreading the virus in the community. Quarantine for COVID-19 should last for a period of 14 days in a room with a door. If symptoms develop during the 14-day period, the individual should be placed under isolation and evaluated for COVID-19.

> **Social Distancing** – The act of remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet, or 2 meters) from others when possible. Social distancing strategies can be applied on an individual level (e.g., avoiding physical contact), a group level (e.g., canceling group activities where individuals will be in close contact), and an operational level (e.g., rearranging desks in an office to increase distance between workers).

**Emotional impact of quarantine**
The simple act of being quarantined can be distressing. When people are quarantined, they:
- Can be completely separated from loved ones
- Lose their freedom of movement
- Don't know if they will show symptoms or not
- Don't know how the disease may affect them
- Have no understanding of how long they will be separated
- Experience boredom and have too much time to worry about the situation

People who have been quarantined have reported or shown a high prevalence of symptoms of psychological distress and disorder. Symptoms reported include emotional disturbance, confusion, depression, stress,

irritability, insomnia and post-traumatic stress symptoms. In addition, the stigma surrounding those in quarantine can lead people to feel rejected and/or avoid seeking help.

## How to reduce the negative effects on mental health

- **Seek trusted information sources.** COVID-19 information and news is everywhere, and it's hard to know what's true. Follow news from the World Health Organization, the CDC and your state health department. Stay away from suspect information that well-intentioned people may share on social media. If you have specific questions about your situation, call your doctor.
- **Make sure you have adequate supplies.** Make your experience as tolerable as possible. Make sure you have basic supplies such as food, water and medicine for the duration of the quarantine period. Many communities have stores or services that will deliver essential items to your door, so keep a list in case you need anything.
- **Make the most of your downtime.** As noted above, isolation, boredom and stigma negatively impact mental health. Call old friends you haven't talked to. Catch up on your reading, do crossword puzzles or play electronic games. Listen to music. Organize those piles of paper you haven't gotten to. If you can, work remotely.
- **Keep a journal, blog or vlog about your experience.** Writing down your feelings and experiences, or talking about them, can be cathartic for some people. And if you are comfortable sharing it, your journal can be helpful for other people in the same situation.
- **Don't be afraid to reach out.** Talk to a neighbor or two and let them know of your situation so they can help. Find others who are going through the same thing or have been in your shoes before. Talking to someone who knows what you're going through can help you feel less alone.
- **Focus on how you are helping.** Remind yourself that your isolation, while difficult to bear, is truly helping contain the spread of disease and potentially saving lives.

If you find yourself feeling overly sad, angry or anxious, contact a behavioral health professional. They can conduct appointments over the phone and provide helpful advice.

## After the quarantine

You've stayed away from everyone for 14 days, and you're still healthy. When you are released from quarantine, remember that social distancing may still be in force.

You might have some residual stress from being alone for so long, or you might be angry that you had to stay separated from loved ones when you weren't contagious. It's OK to have those feelings. If they don't subside after a few months, talk to a behavioral health provider.

For more information and tips, visit www.MagellanHealthcare.com/COVID-19.

*Adapted from: Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., & Rubin, G. J. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. The Lancet, 395(10227), 912–920. doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30460-8.*

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