

Staying Mentally Healthy During Self-Isolation or Quarantine

The Department of Mental Health offers the information below, gathered from a range of experts, to help Vermonters cope in this time of uncertainty. While we may not be able to take part in our usual work and social routines, we can create new routines and practices to help us feel well.

This information is compiled and adapted from several sources, including a New York Times [interview](#) with psychologist and author Dr. Harriet Lerner, the Harvard Medical School's blog, [Healthbeat](#), the [Centers for Disease Control](#) and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).

Get the Facts

Beware getting information on-line from unknown sources. The best sources of information about the Coronavirus can be found at these sites:

- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [Vermont Department of Health](#)
- [Vermont Department of Mental Health](#)

Be Kind to Yourself

This is a time of great uncertainty, and meanwhile, other challenges in our lives continue. You may be dealing with a chronic health issue or supporting a family member with on-going health challenges completely unrelated to the Coronavirus. There may be other issues within your family that are troubling, or with your job. You may struggle with anxiety or depression on a daily basis, or other mental health challenges.

If we react to the additional anxiety that we may feel as a result of the risks associated with the Coronavirus by comparing ourselves to others who seem to be coping better or telling ourselves we are "weak" we may increase our anxiety and feelings of isolation.

Now is the time for [self-compassion](#). Be as kind to yourself as you are to a precious loved one.

Identify the Source (s) of your Anxiety

This may sound ridiculous - it's the Coronavirus! But what about the situation we find ourselves in because of the Coronavirus is making you anxious? Is it the uncertainty? Risk to you? A loved one? And yes, you may be feeling anxious about all three of those things and more. But as psychologist and author Dr. Harriet Lerner told the [New York Times](#), getting specific can be greatly beneficial. If we can identify what is anxiety-producing, we can get a little distance from it, instead of feeling like we're immersed in an all-encompassing sense of unease.

Let your Anxiety be a Unifying Force

You may be thinking, “great, I know everything is uncertain, I’ve acknowledged I’m anxious and even identified the specific factors making me anxious. I’m still anxious and self-isolating, however. Now what?”

The [CDC](#), the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA) and other mental health experts, recommend connecting with others and asking what you can do to help them, while also sharing with them what you need. The help that can be shared, of course, is limited during a time of [social-distancing and self-isolation](#), but phone calls, on-line meet-ups using SKYPE, Face-Time or Zoom, for example, can help with loneliness and boredom. You can still have dinner with friends – schedule a meet-up online and eat together.

[Front Porch Forum](#), a free community-building online message board, is an excellent way to learn of community needs for connection and to post your own.

Self-Care is Key

It’s easy to put off taking care of ourselves while we are busy getting ready for an emergency, responding to an emergency, or when we are feeling overwhelmed. It may feel like “just one more thing” to do, but taking a walk, practicing [yoga](#) (and if you have limited mobility, there are sites for [yoga](#) for you too) or other [stress reductions techniques](#) such as [mindfulness](#), or taking a few moments to read something [uplifting](#) can shift our mood and help us get a different perspective in trying times. There is also evidence that managing our stress in healthy ways can strengthen our [immune system](#).

Maintain Healthy Routines

The Coronavirus and concerns about the illness it causes, has upended most of our daily routines. A large number of people are self-isolating or in quarantine in their homes; others are still reporting to a workplace, but what they do when they arrive there is deeply affected by the new reality we’re living in as a result of the Coronavirus. While many of us may chafe from too much routine, having our day-to-day habits disrupted or even erased for a significant period of time can itself be a source of anxiety.

Start today to create new routines that support your well-being. You might start your day with a walk (outdoors and staying at least six feet away from anyone else), or with 10 minutes or more of mindfulness.

As your day progresses, think about where you can build-in healthy breaks, using some of the techniques, above. And in the evening, while watching a movie may be fun, you might also choose to play a musical instrument, study different types of music you listen to, start a journal or other writing project, and of course, talk to friends and family on the phone or via an on-line platform.

Making these kinds of activities a regular part of your day and week will help you navigate self-isolation or quarantine as healthfully as possible.