

Preparation Prevents Panic and Promotes Empowerment and Positivity!

An Practical Guide to Maintaining Mental and Physical Health in Prolonged Isolation for the over 70s.

Please forward this online to those you think this may benefit, or wash your hands and print this off and put it through the letterbox of an elderly person you know without internet. This is in large type because over 70s sometimes have poor sight.

Organising a routine in advance for potentially weeks of isolation can seem daunting. This is a practical guide to prevent feelings of helplessness and hopelessness - this will help you make a plan to help stay healthy, motivated and empowered.

Evidence has suggested that the main way to stay motivated is through autonomy (choice of activity), mastery (learning something), and purpose (Daniel Pink, 2009). These things are easy to weave into your day if you plan for them in advance. It is also important to separate your day into blocks of time and to consider the types of activity you can do (energetic, gentle, and fun) and different places around the house and garden you can do these, to break the monotony.

How should I set up a routine? What activities can I plan!?

Separating your day into different rooms can be really helpful, perhaps: mornings outside and downstairs, afternoons upstairs; or mornings in east facing rooms and

afternoons in west facing rooms to get good sunlight which helps mood; alternatively you can separate your day into blocks of time around different activities: energetic activities in the morning, gentle activities after lunch, fun activities early evening, telephone calls and letter writing before bed for example. Also, planning activities that help stimulate your 5 senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste) can help prevent mental ill health in isolation.

Essential Things To Prepare in Advance

- *a clock and calendar for the main rooms you will be in
- *a dossit box and / or notepad of medications taken (it is easy lose track of time when isolated and miss routine medication)
- *a diary to write down positive thoughts and goals for the next day
- *a few extra pens, notebooks and sellotape to stick reminders of things around the house,
- *a list of places that deliver food/drink/medicine/newspapers and books locally
- *a few things to do outside to ensure you get some vitamin D, fresh air and exercise such as chairs put outside, bird feeders and food, young plants to watch grow and garden with later, seeds and fruit trees, and balls, hula hoops and skipping ropes to play with
- *a home-made “mental emergency” box may also be really helpful in the event you feel low (described below)

Specific Outside Activities:

Stick a piece of paper on the door to your outside space with three categories: choice, mastery and purpose and list what things you can do, and goals you have for the week. Being outside is important both for vitamin D levels which keep your bones strong, muscle strength to prevent falls, for exercises for your heart and lungs and being in and around greenery and gardening has a wealth of evidence that protects and improves mental health.

Gentle Activities

Go around the garden and feel different textures of leaf, bush and flower. Taste and smell herbs and fruit. Note how the seasons are changing - what has buds, what is coming into flower, what is bearing fruit, what insects and wildlife is flying by. Read a book outside. Draw a picture outside. Cloud watch.

Energetic and Fun Activities

Get a ball, football, netball and net, hula hoop or skipping rope and set yourself challenges in your diary - how many times can you throw it up high, or against the wall and catch it - can you improve this each week? How many hulas can you do? Always try and log what you do each day so you get a feeling of achievement, and write a new challenge for yourself for the following week. Blow bubbles, make a bird feeder and other wildlife homes from things around the garden. Make a willow or mud sculpture. Make a cairn of stones.

Mastery and What to Learn - How to draw, improve your poetry, how to garden, how to plant and tend vegetables and fruit, how to make habitats for wildlife in your garden.

Purpose and Who to Help - Feed the birds breadcrumbs and vegetables, make habitats for wildlife using materials around your garden, start a fruit and vegetable patch for yourself. Grow extra plants for a food bank - they always need fresh produce and strawberries, raspberries, beans and potatoes in potato bags of compost are easy to master. Patio fruit trees are readily available in garden centres and from catalogues. Make bird feeders for other families when the virus is over. Do long-put off maintenance jobs such as painting fences and de-weeding.

Specific Inside Activities:

Gentle Activities - Spend time with the windows open to let in fresh air and listen to the birds. Listen to the radio, music you love, audiobooks and television, surf the internet and read favourite books. Write letters. Write poetry. Phone a friend or family member. Puzzles. Jigsaws. Sudoku. Crosswords.

Fun Activities - Craft! Perhaps use natural materials to decorate your living space, or use them in art projects which could include leaves, flowers, feathers, tree bark or seeds. Cook something different in a cookbook you haven't had out for a long time. Knit. Sew. Crochet. Collage. Paint. Draw. Colour in. Sing. Play an instrument.

Energetic Activities - Do a deep clean one room at a time, dance to music, go up and down the stairs, do an online workout such as a step-class using the bottom step of your staircase, yoga, or pilates all available on the NHS website to name a few. Do seated exercises if this is too much.

Mastery and What to Learn - Start things you have always meant to get around to doing such as reading that book you've had for months, writing the book you always meant to write. Learn something new: poetry, practice drawing, learnt to knit or crochet, learn a new language online or with an audiobook, learn to sing, play the instrument you knew once that has been gathering dust for ages. Learn a new skills online - there are a multiple of MOOCs online to access. Grow seeds for flowers to cheer you up in the coming months and vegetables and fruit (tomatoes, peppers, dwarf beans, dwarf peas, salad, spring onions, strawberries are great to start with and can all be grown in pots or in grow-bags inside). If bending down is difficult, think ahead a little and get someone to deliver grow-bags and put on a countertop or windowsill where you can easily tend and water them. Local garden centres often deliver and so do gardening catalogues for this purpose.

Purpose and Who to Help - Note down memoirs and family history you have always meant to note down for your grandchildren, sort through photograph albums and write down who is in all the photos for future generations. Have a clear out of your cupboards, and digital files.

Helping Feelings of Purpose - Who Can You Help?

There are many activities that you can learn, improve and do to help others who are less well off than yourself when you are isolated which will give you a feeling of purpose. There are contacts and websites to learn more on how to do all these activities at the end of the this document.

- Learn to knit or crochet blankets and warm clothes for refugees this winter
- Sew clothes for families escaping domestic abuse
- Grow extra fruit and vegetables for your local food bank or school (if you offer for your local gardening club, church, school someone might come and harvest these for you to keep you isolated, although the risk of catching a virus from outside will be very low, you can plan to do this before it rains so you feel extra protected)
- Write your happy memories of childhood down for your grandchildren to remember, and more recent memoirs and life lessons you wish your grandchildren to know!
- Write to other isolated people you know or prisoners who suffer extreme isolation and hardship (**Wash your hands before writing, don't lick the envelope and ask someone to post these for you!**)
- Make tactile books for blind and deaf children. These can be collages made from stiff card or sewn

How to stay positive - a diary can really help here!

Write a list somewhere you can see it and look at it for a good 5 minutes each day. These things may seem daft but research has shown having concerted time thinking about your strengths can help peoples confidence and happiness

and makes them more productive at work. Also, isolation prevents people getting natural feedback from day to day which erodes confidence so noting your activities, small achievements and planning goals yourself will help keep you mentally resilient and prevent mental ill health.

1). A list of your personal strengths, and focus on times when these have shown themselves. Look at this list for 5 minutes every day and try each day to add one more thing.

(This may seem daft at first but research has shown this helps people at work feel much happier, confident, and be more productive even when doing mundane tasks).

2). List the things you would like to learn and achieve while you are isolated

3). Write what things you can do to help others while you are isolated

Write 8 sentences in a diary each day to stay motivated:

1). One thing you have enjoyed that day

2). One thing you have done or learnt

- 3). One small step you have made to a goal you have set yourself
- 4). Write something you are looking forward to doing the next day
- 5). Write one goal for the next day for physical activity
- 6). Write one goal for the next day for learning something new
- 7) Write one thing you are going to do for somebody else tomorrow (even if you can't see them, you can do things in advance or online)
- 8) Write one person you will try and contact tomorrow

Write these 8 things on the next weeks pages of your diary in advance to make sure you do them even if you feel low

Also, consider writing positive phrases you like and stick them around the house

A mental-emergency box

Fill this with things that make you feel happy, and also help distract all your senses to bring you back to reality:

- Books you love to read, old letters that make you feel happy, joke books
- Old DVDs or films that make you feel safe, and happy
- Music you love to listen to, and CDs and have apps or list of websites that play relaxing music such as birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall
- Textures you like to feel - feathers, scarves, beads, bubble wrap
- Photos of things that make you feel happy - family, friends, places, postcards, magazine cutouts of places you might like to visit
- Emergency treats that make you feel happy - chocolate, butterscotch, clementines, and emergency dry ingredients and herbs to make your favourite dish for dinner
- Things that have smells that draw you in - lavender bags, herbs, spices, soaps, coffee, tea
- Colouring in books and pencils
- A list of websites with meditation or yoga videos and sounds that helps you
- Have an emergency number to call if you start to feel really low, anxious or unwell such as your GP, the NHS 111 number, the Samaritans (Tel no: 116 123) for free, or a trusted friend or family member. If you can't get through to them CALL AGAIN.
- If you are in Crisis don't hesitate to call 999.

It is important your worry about catching or spreading Coronavirus does not stop you accessing help. Health care practitioners training and protection to care for you safely in an emergency, so seek help if you need it.

Useful Websites

For more help look at the NHS website www.patient.co.uk for HOW to self-isolate, how to wash your hands properly.

For government advice about staying at home go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

For excellent advice to help and sustain mental wellbeing during this period see this excellent article: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

- Learn to knit or crochet blankets and warm clothes for refugees this winter:
- Free knitting clothes patterns. <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/donate/donate-goods/what-you-can-donate/knitting-for-oxfam>
- Some useful websites where to buy seeds, fruit, vegetables. Also look for your local garden centre local shops need our business, or contact your local gardening group who may have free seeds and plants they can drop by.
- <https://www.chilternseeds.co.uk>
- <https://www.simplyseed.co.uk/cheap-seeds.html>
- <https://www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk/Vegetable-Seeds-1/>
- <https://www.mr-fothergills.co.uk>
- <https://www.thompson-morgan.com>

- Write to other isolated people you know (Wash your hands before writing and don't lick the envelope and ask someone to post these for you!).
- A link to a postcard to print off and help isolated people: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-51880695?SThisFB&fbclid=IwAR3zb8tBQw6H-C2C5J53egsgfvomkznl6h72XfiK2vrOi6sqQqkMSJ77aTM>
- Befriend a person in prison. Often prisoners have come from situations of deprivation, poverty and abuse and suffer from severe depression, anxiety and loneliness. Befriending them can help them through the added isolation that will happen during this outbreak. <https://www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk>
- Make tactile books for blind and deaf children. These can be collages made from stiff card or sewn. <http://www.clearvisionproject.org/resources/Tactile-book-makers-guide.pdf>.
- Also, when doing a clear out consider finding and saving objects that could be used in “book bags” used by children with severe disabilities <http://www.bagbooks.org/support-us/collecting-items-to-use-in-multi-sensory-books>

Remember, prior planning and preparation will protect you from loneliness, anxiety, and panic. There is much you can do while isolated to be happy, productive and useful. You are worthwhile and this will pass.