Coronavirus (COVID-19) has resulted in many challenges including the loss of daily contact with others that work and social activities so often provides.

People have been required to quickly transition to working from home. Social events and activities have been canceled, and community engagement has been restricted in order to align to government initiatives to slow the spread of the virus.

Although being alone generally provides time for individuals to reflect and come to terms with change, and experiencing loneliness for short periods of time is not necessarily unhealthy, prolonged isolation combined with feelings of loneliness can be damaging to an individual's health and wellbeing.

Being lonely is not the same as having depression or anxiety – it is not a mental illness, however research highlights that loneliness can be a precursor to depression and other mental illnesses. Recognising the signs and putting plans in place to alleviate this experience early will be of considerable benefit to your health and wellbeing.

## Key signs of loneliness

**Poor sleep** – waking up multiple times or not feeling rested after a night's sleep

**Poor diet** – Eating more, and often unhealthy food as a way of comforting yourself

**Poor motivation** – feeling sluggish and less energised to engage in everyday activities

**Not feeling good enough** – negatively comparing yourself to others

**Negative self-talk** – more time alone can lead to engaging in unhelpful thinking styles

**Feeling misunderstood** – that others just don't "get you"

**Sadness and crying easily** – feeling low frequently and sometimes for no obvious reason

**Becoming withdrawn** – not wanting to spend time with people when the opportunity arises

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# How you can help yourself

**1** **NORMALISE YOUR EXPERIENCE**

Just knowing that there are many others across the globe experiencing the same feelings can be helpful. In a time when connectivity is easier than ever through social media platforms and the internet, there are still many individuals who feel lonely. It's a normal emotion that everyone experiences at some point in their life, and something that you can overcome.

**2** **UNDERSTAND HOW LONELINESS AFFECTS YOU**

We know from the key signs of loneliness that the experience will be different for each person. It's important to recognise how it may affect your day to day functioning and whether it's starting to have a negative impact on your mental health. Tuning into these thoughts, feelings, and behaviours early and putting strategies in place to shift them can reduce the risk of a more serious mental health issue developing.

**3** **INCREASE CONNECTION WITH OTHERS**

It's important now, more than ever, to stay in touch with loved ones and colleagues. Use video calls where possible for a face-to-face experience, schedule phone calls with friends or family, or engage in social media opportunities to be part of a group. Being part of a group and feeling connected to others significantly reduces feelings of loneliness and depressed mood.

**4** **PRACTICE HEALTHY SELF-TALK**

Negative self-talk goes hand in hand with loneliness and without shifting this way of thinking, it can become routine and increase your experience of loneliness. Try thinking of three positive things about your life every day for a seven-day period. An example may be things you're grateful for. Don't make this a complicated exercise, simple things are best.

**5** **ENGAGE IN A HOBBY OR INTEREST**

Boredom adds weight to loneliness but there are still plenty of options to keep yourself occupied. Start with creating a list of your interests and then explore each to see if they're viable options to pursue whilst we are in lockdown. You could be creative in adapting the interest to an indoor activity! The action of going through this activity will allow you to experience how it feels to be occupied and focused on a task.

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