Avoiding fear, anxiety while you self-quarantine

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(HealthDay)—If you self-quarantine or practice social distancing to prevent the spread of coronavirus, you might feel lonely, anxious or depressed.

But there are ways to cope, Northwestern University experts say.

"First, acknowledge that this is a stressful time and likely to bring up lots of emotions like fear and anxiety," said Judith Moskowitz, a professor of medical social sciences at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

If you have to work at home, fight feelings of isolation by using web conferencing that allows you to connect "face-to-face" with coworkers, she advised.

"If you are stuck home with your kids, see it as an opportunity to connect with them—play games, read books or watch movies together," Moskowitz said. "Creating small positive moments like these can help you cope better with the stress of having to stay home. Write down the positive moments in a day to help you keep a perspective and appreciation for all that is still good. Encourage your kids to do the same."

Check in with friends and neighbors, too, especially if you know someone who lives alone. Moskowitz said it will foster a sense that you're all in it together.

Getting plenty of exposure to outdoor light, especially in the morning, will also help.

"Light is one of nature's strongest signals, aligning our biological and social clocks with the sun," said Dr. Phyllis Zee, director of the Northwestern Medicine Sleep Disorders Center. This syncing results in better sleep, more efficient metabolism and healthier heart and immune functions, she said.

In addition, light signals reach brain areas that regulate mood. Exposure to bright daytime light can boost mood and performance, while dimming light two to three hours before bedtime can help enhance sleep, Zee added.

Andrea Graham, assistant professor of medical social sciences, said the combination of social isolation and a disrupted routine can fuel feelings of sadness and loneliness.

"To combat those feelings, schedule some at-home workouts, which can boost your mood," she suggested. Use social media and online chats to connect with friends and family. Group activities such as cooking and worship are often live-streamed.

"Keep doing activities that make you feel good—even though they're at home—to help you maintain a positive mental state," Graham advised. "And maintain some kind of routine, still waking up at a consistent, reasonable time. It's good for your mood. It feels less aimless with that big disruption in routine."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlines how to protect against COVID-19.

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