

Tips to cope with lockdown as cold weather arrives

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(HealthDay)—Isolation may pose mental health challenges for people as

they spend more time indoors in the winter during the coronavirus pandemic, an expert warns.

Maintaining safe forms of social contact is crucial, especially for people who live alone, according to Frank Ghinassi, president and CEO of Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care, in New Jersey.

Ideas to battle isolation include staying in touch with family and friends over [social media](#), through video or over the phone, or even sharing a cup of coffee with someone over the phone in the morning.

Write letters. Sending and receiving them can be very rewarding, Ghinassi suggested.

If you live with others, do activities together such as [board games](#) or listen to audio broadcasts, rather than watch TV. Go for a group walk outdoors.

If you can't get together with family over the holidays, you can still follow your traditions, even if it's on a smaller scale, Ghinassi noted in a Rutgers news release.

Maintain your health by following a [nutritious diet](#), exercising and getting enough sleep, he added.

"The people I worry about the most are those who live in unsafe environments or where there is domestic violence. I encourage people in these situations to reach out to agencies or their case managers," Ghinassi said.

It's normal to mourn the loss of social activities you love, such as going to theaters, parties and restaurants, but people "should seek out the support of family and friends and, if necessary, professionals or religious

officials if they feel their grieving is sustained without seeing any reduction after four to six weeks," he advised.

"If you get into what feels like a slump and that lasts more than four weeks without a lot of relief, it's a signal you are not snapping out of it," Ghinassi said.

"Look for disruptions in your life," he explained. "Are you finding it difficult to get and stay asleep? Are there changes in your eating habits? Have you lost your feeling of hopefulness for the future? Are you disinterested in things that used to bring you joy?"

In more severe cases, do you have feelings that "'it wouldn't be the worst thing if I didn't wake up tomorrow' or do you have thoughts of harming yourself or other people? That is a sign to contact a professional," Ghinassi said, such as using the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration helpline (1-800-662-HELP or 1-800-662-4357).

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more on [coping during the pandemic](#).

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