

April 2020 EAP Notes: Social Isolation in the Era of Coronavirus Disease



With schools closed, people working from home and our leaders dissuading us from nonessential errands, a person could easily slip into a state of social isolation. *Why should we be mindful of social isolation, and what can we do to help ourselves and loved ones?*

Effects of social isolation

Social isolation can have dangerous physical effects – research shows that it's just as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weak immune system and cognitive decline.

Mentally, social isolation during this pandemic will affect us all differently. Maybe you're thriving as an introvert. But if you're an extrovert who gets energy from being around others, you might be prone to experiencing feelings of depression and loneliness right now. It can be quite a shock to social beings to be around friends, family, coworkers and the public one day, then be told to stay at home as much possible the next. Some people with existing anxiety and depression might be OK in a situation like this, where everyone has to do the same thing and there are relatively clear expectations to adhere to. When a person with anxiety or depression has a clearer view of what's going on and they have more facts to base assumptions off of, they're better able to handle changes that occur. However, this isn't the case for everyone with mental health issues. People with more severe and persistent mental illnesses may struggle with telehealth instead of having face-to-face appointments with their therapists.

Can social isolation be prevented?

There's no one answer to ensure that social distancing doesn't spiral into social isolation. At some point, this will end. *For now, we're not in terrible danger of a large portion of the population suffering prolonged isolation.* This is a collective problem, so it will take a collective effort to stay connected with each other. Until that time, here are a few things to help:

- Technology is your friend! Right now, it's a vital lifeline. Now's the time to use technology creatively and treat it as a resource.
- Look out for those in your life who may be prone to isolation, especially seniors. Step up your communication with them with phone calls or video chats. And be mindful that your kids might also be feeling isolated
- Working from home? You're still connecting with your coworkers via video conferencing and messaging apps, but you can't spontaneously walk over to Jessica's desk to chat. It's those micro-interactions that are hardest to be without. If you're feeling lonely, reach out to one of your coworkers.
- Keep your pets close. While your dog isn't Patrick from the office who's always good for a laugh, they are a comfort – and that's something very much needed in a time of change.

The good news is that this period of time will come to an end – and you're not alone. Everyone on the planet is experiencing this together. Your feelings are normal. No one has a guidebook on how you should or shouldn't feel during a pandemic. If you're experiencing fear, sadness, anxiety or depression, Best Care EAP counselors are here to help. Schedule your confidential appointment by calling **(402) 354-8000** or **(800) 801-4182** or send an email to eap@bestcareeap.org.