



THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL BENEFITS OF SOCIALIZATION

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Abstract

From the beginning, man has lived in groups, humans are social animals, and our biological, psychological, and social systems have evolved to thrive in communicating with peers. What is certain is that most of us are "programmed", psychologically and biologically to socialize.

The declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the WHO (World Health Organization) imposed several precautionary measures, such as quarantine, social distancing or, in some cases, total lockdown of a region or country. For the first time since World War II, humanity has had to seek to adapt to the new conditions and restrictions imposed by the authorities, all necessary to limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Background Covid-19: To prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was recommended to practice social distancing, which means to keep at least 2 meters away from others. Furthermore, people who have been potentially exposed to coronavirus have to be isolated at home for at least 2 weeks. People are social beings, and social distance can impact their physical and psychological well-being. All our systems, including social, psychological, and biological, have developed in and around social groups and human interaction.

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1. Introduction

People are social beings, and the connections they form are the basis of society and evolution. People are dependent on each other and need interpersonal relationships in the development process. If the interindividual relationship is limited or restricted, there is the risk of endangering mental and physical health. It has been shown that social isolation increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, the occurrence of immune system disorders and, especially, increases psychological stress. On the other hand, an extended social network can be a factor in protection against cognitive decline and, implicitly, dementia.

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Social isolation occurs when an individual has not the support of family members, friends, and community or has not the feeling of being part of a social network. It is logical that social isolation imposes stress on our minds and bodies and has a significant impact on our health. Medical, social, and psychological studies have confirmed that there is a direct correlation between the mental well-being and physical health of a person and the degree to which that person feels connected to others. Social isolation and the associated feeling of loneliness significantly increase the risk of premature death, and this risk is higher than with many health indicators.

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2. Social Isolation

Social isolation is often confused with loneliness, but although the two terms are closely related to each other, they do not have the same meaning. You can be alone in a crowd, but not socially isolated. Isolation has been defined as an objective state through which a person's contacts can be counted, while loneliness is a subjective experience.

It has also been shown that loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity. Loneliness can seriously affect individual's physical, mental, and cognitive health. Hawkey's research found a connection between psychological perception of social isolation and adverse health effects such as: poor sleep quality, impaired executive function, poor cardiovascular function, accelerated cognitive decline, depression, and decreased immunity at every stage of life².

Experiencing certain states of anxiety is common during this period and is not a sign of weakness or irrationality, and accepting these feelings is the first step in managing them.

Anxiety can be related to:

- Personal health or the health of others
- Monitoring health, by doctors or even by ourselves
- Job loss and implicitly financial instability
- Ensuring basic needs
- Raising and educating children
- Insecurity and frustrations related to the time we will spend in isolation, social distancing
- States of loneliness generated by the lack of social contacts;

² Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker, Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review - *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 10, nr. 2, 2015



- Boredom caused by lack of regular activities;
- Anxiety caused by the thought of being infected due to the negligence of others.

3. Mental and physical health maintaining

Exercise is a well-documented stress reducer. Exercising also helps to improve mental and physical condition. Whether you enter a field and practice a sport (football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, etc.), if you go to a gym or take a simple walk in nature, this physical activity stimulates the secretion of endorphins. These are the chemicals in your brain that are responsible for your well-being. While endorphins (substances of happiness) increase the stress hormones decrease, including cortisol and adrenaline.

Physical activity contributes to better oxygenation of the brain, which leads to improved intellectual performance. Thus, concentration, memory, ability to understand develops and increases mental tone. Sport disciplines, and all these elements, combined, lead to increased intellectual performance. Regardless of age, physical activity is necessary for the physical and mental health of the individual. Scientific studies and practical interventions proved in time the beneficial effect of exercise in improving physical and psychological well-being³.

The benefits of physical activity at any age:

- sport in children's lives: strengthens muscles and bones, develops flexibility, balance and endurance, forms the correct posture and increases immunity;
- sports in the life of adolescents: shapes and maintains the body, burns fat, develops the locomotor system harmoniously, improves blood circulation, maintains the strength of muscles and bones;
- sports for adults and elderly: maintains or restores bone mobility, strengthens muscles, improves blood circulation and respiration, maintains skin firmness, eliminates fat.

Even during social isolation, you can exercise at home by watching workouts on the Internet or by subscribing to an online fitness program.

Recommendations for people in isolation, what to do while they are not leaving the house⁴:

- do gymnastics or any form of physical activity in or around the house;
- structuring the daily program, in which to include as diverse activities as possible (eg, "to plan for the next day at least two activities that he likes"), to

³ Pop, C.L., Physical Activity, Body Image, and Subjective Well-Being, in Well-being and Quality of Life - Medical Perspective, Mukadder Mollaoglu

⁴ Ciomag, V., Zamfir, M.V., The Benefit of Physical Exercises of our Own Body and Health, Univers Strategic, nr. 2(26)/2016, pp. 211-215



exploit the time he has available to do things he could not do until now, which he kept postponing;

- to be patient, to keep calm and to follow the rules, to think about the fact that it is only a period that will pass;
- to avoid continuous contact with news programs (eg, "to filter their information very well", "to be informed about the current situation on TV or other sources only if necessary"; "to watch the news only a once a day");
- to listen to cultural programs on the radio;
- to continue their professional activity at home, if possible;
- to discover new hobbies ("to discover something they enjoy", "to do something creative");
- gardening (eg, "who can move to the house to do it", and in the block you can take care of flowers, on the balcony can be placed planters);
- to take advantage of free time and spend it with loved ones, to communicate with the family by phone / social networks (eg, "those who have children to enjoy these moments, going to work robs us a lot of time for children", "to talk daily with the children and with the family by phone / Internet");
- to reflect on the self (eg, to build as much as possible in themselves using the means at their disposal), meditation, yoga;
- to clean the house in an organized way (eg, to order in the house the places rarely used);
- music (eg, to listen to music daily, especially to relax or to do different physical exercises on rhythms);
- to study what they wanted to study but failed due to lack of time.

What it is not recommendable to do in self-isolation?

- to avoid spending overtime in bed during the day;
- to avoid non-stop watching TV (eg, "not to watch news programs for more than an hour a day") and to avoid information from unauthorized sources;
- avoid alcohol abuse and excessive smoking;
- do not isolate emotionally;
- do not consume sweets in excess and generally high-calories foods;
- not to take medication without a doctor's recommendation;
- to avoid leaving the house if it is not absolutely necessary;
- to avoid excessive discussions on social networks about Coronavirus;
- to avoid panic;
- to avoid online gambling.



Conclusions

An important way to protect our mental and physical health during social isolation, is to continue practicing physical activities, enjoy reading and communicating with those emotionally linked, using video-call technologies.

The methods to cope the stress of self-isolation are:

- daily moderate physical activities;
- direct communication strategies, with the other members of the family they lived with or by phone / internet with those living elsewhere;
- online entertainment (network games, feature films, documentaries) or TV (movies, entertainment programs, sports);
- reading
- gardening, board games with other family members in self-isolation, news programs and educational programs (TV or online);
- personal development activities (online courses, meditation, yoga);
- development of professional skills, necessary for the labor market in the post-pandemic period (online language courses, PC operation, overspecializations in their own field of activity, etc.).

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