# Blue Cross®
# VIRTUAL WELL-BEING

Blue Cross
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of Michigan

## Tips to survive social isolation and prevent loneliness

It's estimated there are now more than 100 million Americans who have been ordered to stay safe at home. This social distancing is crucial to flatten the curve that will give our health care system the best chance to help people who will get sick. Short-term loneliness is expected to spike since we're isolated from our friends and family, and it will be difficult.

Loneliness is associated with increased health issues. A study from the National Academies of Science found loneliness causes:



- An increased risk of premature mortality from all causes
- A 29% increased risk of heart disease
- A 32% increased risk of stroke
- A consistent relationship between social isolation and depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation

There's a difference between being alone and being lonely. Some people are perfectly content being alone. Others need more interaction, and being alone or isolated from friends makes them sad or feel lonely. While we're under stay-at-home orders, our options to connect face-to-face have decreased. We're living our lives virtually, but there's still the risk of loneliness because of loss of in-person interaction. For some people, this creates a type of toxic chain in their bodies by creating stress hormones that suppress immune responses and trigger inflammation. On the other hand, studies have found that positive social relationships give people a 50% greater chance of surviving over time compared with people with weak social ties.

Fortunately, there are ways to connect with your friends and family while remaining socially isolated. They include:

- Keeping a routine while you're home. Schedule your day and week, and have a regular waking, eating and sleeping time. Make sure you include time to move and get outside.
- Setting aside a "worry time." If you tend to be a worrier, allow yourself some time to worry. Go through all the scenarios and then tell yourself you're not going to think about it again until the next day. Take a few cleansing breaths. This gives you control over those thoughts.
- Stay connected to your people. Text and phone your family and friends. Programs like Skype, Zoom and Facetime are even more beneficial in creating connections and combatting loneliness.
- Reach out for help. If you find yourself struggling during social isolation, contact a friend, family member or someone else you trust.

Sources: **cdc.gov**\*, **nap.edu**\*, **nytimes.com**\*, **thehill.com**\*

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