



## MAINTAINING A HEALTHY MIND DURING QUARANTINE

Being at home for long periods can be challenging for some people. Most of us have never experienced a situation like this before. Therefore, it is helpful to take into consideration some aspects that will help us to maintain a healthy mind during the quarantine.

### 1. What Am I Feeling?

Emotions are alarms that our body uses as indicators of an existent event that requires to be solved. They announce our needs are somehow not being fulfilled, and it is vital to adopt an attitude of attention and openness even when they are unpleasant. When an emotion is ignored, it comes back more intensely. Some feelings are important, and some others are not as much, but we ought to pay attention to them all before dismissing them.

The most common emotions during quarantine are:

- **Anxiety:** We think there might be a danger in the future, and there is a need to prepare ourselves.
- **Fear:** We detect we are in a dangerous situation.
- **Sadness:** We feel that we are losing something. It can range from not being able to go for a walk to losing our freedom, our daily routine, or even losing our health or our loved ones.
- **Irritability:** It happens when we are in a situation where we are not comfortable, but we feel we cannot do anything about it.
- **Boredom:** It warns us there is a situation needing to be changed.

## **2. Some Tips for Managing Our Emotions and Negative Thoughts**

We can start from distinguishing between emotions concerning actual problems that need solutions right now, or hypothetical worries, “what ifs” or concerns that anticipate worst-case scenarios.

When a concern is about something affecting us right now, it is essential to take action now.

When we worry about a subject that does not currently exist, but which might happen in the future, it is beneficial to postpone the worrying until we set aside some time in our day to think about it.

Setting a specific time for our worry and deciding on how long it will be for is crucial. Whenever we feel worried about something, we can say to ourselves, “I am not going to think about this right now. It is not helpful, and it is only making me feel anxious. I can think about it during my ‘worrying time.’” The worrying time will help us to find solutions to our concerns.

Being conscious of our emotions and deciding whether we can find solutions for them is another key strategy. When the answer is “no,” the only solution is to accept reality. The truth is that we are not able to control some parts of this situation. By thinking that we wish things were different, we maintain the anxiety. It can be useful to say to ourselves something like, “It is normal for my mind and body to react this way, I don’t need to fight against what I am feeling.”

Some people think that they do not have the “right” to feel negative emotions just because other people are going through a harder time, and that leads to them feeling guilty. We all have the right to feel emotions because they are alarms that indicate what we need or what we are lacking.

Obtaining dopamine is vital to feel better with ourselves. Since we have stopped doing things that make us feel good with ourselves, it is crucial to replace them. We can acquire dopamine by doing pleasurable activities (even when those activities feel less pleasurable now).

Some negative thoughts communicate emotions, but other ideas only make us feel anxious. For example, “I am unsure if I will have enough food in the fridge,” is a thought that we can take action for and find a solution. “I am sure all my family

will die” is an unhelpful thought, and therefore it is best to ignore it and instead tell ourselves, “I understand I am worried about this. This is a challenging situation, and it is normal for these thoughts to come to mind, but for now, it is not beneficial for me to think this way.” Being aware of our negative thoughts is essential.

Limiting or avoiding activities and situations that make us feel worse is necessary when possible.

### **3. Avoid Information Overload**

Constantly checking the news gives us a sense of control in the short term, but it creates a state of intense anxiety, uncertainty, and uneasiness in the long run. Limiting this access and checking the news only once or twice daily can significantly reduce our stress levels.

### **4. Have a Routine**

We need to have a routine to give ourselves a sense of control over some situations. By waking up at the same time during the weekdays and at different times during the weekend, we allow our bodies to become aware of the day of the week in which we are.

Eating healthy also contributes to our mental and physical wellbeing.

Getting dressed and having a shower every day gives us a sense of accomplishment and purpose. We can also use some time every day to make a schedule and structure our day. A good strategy is to make two different schedules, one for when we feel more activated or motivated and another one for when we do not. It is entirely reasonable to feel less active some days, so, in that way, we have both scenarios covered.

It feels like we have to exploit our full potential during this time: to learn, to progress on our hobbies, to start doing exercise... We do not need to be productive at all times. It can be helpful to organize a daily routine that involves a balance between activities that give you a sense of achievement, those that help

you to feel close to others, and others that you do for pleasure. We have the right not to feel good and not attaining our goals from time to time. It is not the best moment for us to achieve perfection.

We can set different spaces within our house for various activities: an area for work, a room for relaxation... We can even divide the space within the same place, so our brain associates each activity to a different space. This can help us to relax and unwind if we get stressed from work.

### **5. Some Ideas for the Quarantine**

Humans are social beings; some people are more social than others. However, making plans and being in contact with the people we care about is key to feeling better. We can make plans with our friends online, such as having breakfast or watching a movie together.

There is a wide range of options online, so we can allocate some time in our day to find activities available on your fingertips. We can listen to music, visit virtual museums, plan goals, and even join dancing classes online.

If you find yourself struggling or having intense anxiety, recurrent negative thoughts, difficulty concentrating or sleeping, or you feel extremely overwhelmed or sad, do not hesitate to contact us at [Mentoring.IEU@ie.edu](mailto:Mentoring.IEU@ie.edu).

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