

MENTAL HEALTH OF PEOPLE IN ISOLATION

There have been several efforts to examine the psychological experiences of patients undergoing quarantine/self-isolation over the years, not only in the context of COVID-19. Some mental health concerns found to be prevalent among such people are depressed mood, emotional disturbances, increased levels of stress, irritability, insomnia, post-traumatic stress symptoms, anger, and emotional exhaustion. Of these, depressed mood and irritability stand out as especially common concerns. Others include frustration due to uncertainty and lack of information about health and recovery, and the possibility of infecting others.

The typical duration of quarantine for COVID-19 is 14 days, assuming that the person tests negative for the virus at the end of quarantine. The uncertainty associated with the test results can cause a person to experience higher levels of stress. Quarantine conditions can also apply to people who are not currently showing symptoms of COVID-19, but are at risk of being infected with the virus. In such people, worry about the possibility of carrying the infection can be a source of stress. A lack of information on the rationale for quarantine can add to uncertainty, and cause one to feel a lack of control over the situation. Changes in one's usual

routine, coupled with a lack of activity, can contribute to anger, resentment, and frustration in the person. Individuals in isolation/quarantine are likely to experience boredom, which can lead to feelings of emptiness and helplessness. It is also important to consider the person's limited access to resources that normally help them cope with adversity. For example, in hospital settings, one's access to a variety of food, internet connectivity, entertainment devices, books, and clothes might limit self-care.

Worry and concern can be unpleasant, but are understandable experiences at this time. It is important to attend to what one can do in terms of self-care. Focussing on the present, and on actions that one can control might help. Find ways to stay connected with others. Establish a daily routine and limit the consumption of news regarding COVID-19. Try to incorporate some physical movement through yoga, exercises, stretching, and squats – all of which can be done at home. Fight boredom through resources available at home, or trying out your hobbies. Ultimately, being compassionate to oneself, and finding ways to both offer and receive help from others can help manage loneliness as a result of being in quarantine/isolation.

Notes:

1. This response was first published on the Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC) website.
2. Source of the image used in the background of the article title: <https://pixabay.com/photos/stay-at-home-staying-home-5094617/>. Credits: soumen82hazra, Pixabay. License: CC-0.

Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC) is a group of more than 500 Indian scientists, engineers, technologists, doctors, public health researchers, science communicators, journalists and students who voluntarily came together in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This group can be contacted at indscicov@gmail.com.