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Cabin Fever?

By Anneli Driessen Ph.D., Ph.D., MCC – March 22, 2021

Cabin fever is a common expression referring to negative emotions and distress related to confinement and isolation, such as irritability, hopelessness, lack of focus, and even simple boredom. It is not a disease and not dangerous in and of itself, but our mental and emotional health has a measurable impact on our physical and psychological wellbeing.

Not everyone experiences cabin fever the same way. While some people are immediately gripped with anxiety, dread, restlessness, or simply getting cranky while in isolation, others tend to direct their minds and emotions elsewhere.

But for most people, long periods of isolation can be a real challenge. But even if we are not feeling antsy or starting to go a little ‘stir crazy’, considering and implementing the advice below can help us maintain our good spirits and healthy habits through this period of isolation. We can reduce our stress levels and regain our sense of control and composure.

1. Set a routine

Make a schedule for yourself to follow each day and try to stick to it. Structuring your time will give you a sense of order and control.

2. Accept this discomfort

It’s helpful to acknowledge when things are difficult. It makes it easier to move past them. And they will pass.

3. Stay mentally active

Solve a crossword puzzle. Play a game. Listen to a podcast. Read a good book. Enhance your education and knowledge, or find other ways to keep your mind active.

4. Find ways to connect

Make daily time to video call your family and loved ones. Phone old friends you haven’t heard from in ages.

5. Protect your alone time

If you live with someone else, it is especially easy to get on each other’s nerves when there is nowhere else to go. Set aside time for engaging in separate activities in separate rooms to give yourselves space.

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6. *Keep a journal*

If you are feeling locked in, you can escape into an empty page. Write a daily diary, keep track of dreams, or take the opportunity to chronicle fond memories.

7. *Tune-In – but set limits*

Stay informed, and remember that you're not going through this alone. But if you obsess over stressful news and updates, set limits on when and how much you read or watch.

8. *Eat good quality food*

9. *Make up for lost sun*

Take plenty of Vitamin D3 to make up for missing out on the sun's rays.

10. *Rearrange your closet, clean out a drawer or your basement*

11. *Avoid or, at least, limit alcohol or other mind-impacting drugs*

They only may help short-term but tend to make you feel worse the next day.

12. *Treat yourself to projects*

What were you not able to finish previously? Revisit long-lost or forgotten hobbies.

13. *Movie night*

Stream movies and have a movie night. You can even coordinate movie-watching with friends, then have a group video call to talk about it the next day.

14. *Keep physically active*

15. *Meditate or pray*

Both have proven to help to maintain faith in inner calmness and balance.

16. *Find ways to help others*

Check out volunteer agencies, offer, if possible, complimentary virtual services or emotional or spiritual support. Be creative.

Remember that even though we are physically apart, we need each other to make it through this together.

And, if you live with others in isolation, give each other support and encouragement.

This is the time now to be understanding, patient and forgiving.

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