



6 Ways to Stay Engaged While Social Distancing

As we all know by now, COVID-19 is largely spread through person-to-person contact.^[1] Experts around the world are telling us that to limit the virus' spread, or "flatten the curve," we must physically distance ourselves from others. In order to decrease risk of exposure, the World Health Organization has recommended that all people, not just those suffering with COVID-19, engage in social distancing to slow down the transmission of this virus and reduce the burden on healthcare systems around the world.^[2]

So, what exactly is social distancing, and how can it help diminish the spread of COVID-19? Social distancing is a harm-reduction strategy that calls for limiting in-person interactions and maintaining a safe distance of approximately 6 feet from others when in public spaces.^[3]

While social distancing does not mean you can never leave your home, it does mean that in order to make a real impact, you will need to make some major behavioral modifications—such as avoiding large groups, ordering takeout and cooking instead of dining at restaurants, and opting for video conferences over in-person meetings.

Practicing social distancing successfully will undoubtedly mean spending a lot more time at home than many of us are accustomed to do.

In light of this new reality, staying engaged with your community might feel daunting. Yet in this challenging time it is truly more important than ever. Evidence suggests that a vibrant civic life can contribute to lower mortality rates and better physical and mental health as well as enhanced equity.^[4,5]

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html>

[2] World Health Organization. (2020). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-press-briefing-on-covid-19---13-march-2020>

[3] Pearce, K. (2020). What is social distancing and how can it slow the spread of COVID-19. John Hopkins University. Retrieved from <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/03/13/what-is-social-distancing/>

[4] Cullen, M, & Whiteford, H. (2001). The interrelations of social capital with health and mental health. *Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.*

[5] Guiso, L., Sapienza, P., & Zingales, L. (2011). Civic capital as the missing link. In Benhabib, J., Bisin, A., & Jackson, M. O. (Eds). *Handbook of Social Economics*, 1, 417-480.

So, what can you do to stay connected to your community—and even strengthen those bonds—during this time of social distancing?



**Support
Neighbors**



**Get
Moving**



**Public Life
Participation**



**Resist Urge to
Stockpile**



**Get Informed
Local Voting**



**2020 Census
Participation**

EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

1. Support Your Neighbors.

Studies indicate that Americans today are less likely to trust one another than in years past. In fact, the share of the population that believes “most people can be trusted” fell from approximately 50% in the 1970s to one-third in 2012.^[6]

Let’s take this as an opportunity to reverse that trend. Call up your neighbors, especially those who are elderly, immunocompromised, or living alone to see if they need help accessing services such as grocery stores, banks, or post offices. Healthcare workers and other first responders are also likely in need of additional social support, so make sure to check in on family or friends on the front lines. These are trying times, but through small actions you can let your community know that you are there for them, and perhaps rebuild some of the neighborly connections that may have been lost over the years.

2. Get Moving.

If you want to get moving there is no shortage of free online resources from outlets like [Well + Good](#) and gyms like [YMCA](#) to help you maintain your workout routine. You can even coordinate with friends and neighbors to schedule a workout at the same time via video conference. And if you’re really missing the community created by in-person fitness classes, check in with your favorite local studios to see if they are offering any live virtual classes, which can be a great way to support a favorite business that may be struggling right now. Incorporating physical activity into your day can be a source of valuable interaction, and has been shown to promote mental health by reducing stress and anxiety.^[7,8]

3. Participate in Public Life.

While indoor public spaces may be closed and public events have been canceled, many community centers, libraries, museums, gyms, and other local and national organizations are offering virtual programming to encourage continued engagement and even social interaction. From the Pergamon Museum in Berlin to the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, you can escape the confines of your home without leaving your couch thanks to virtual programming provided free of charge on many museum sites. Places of worship are also offering [virtual programming](#) for those looking to stay in touch with their religious community and maintain their spiritual well-being. While we may not be able to enjoy the physical public realm in the same way, staying connected to these spaces virtually can help us fight the impacts of loneliness, which can include depression as well as diminished immune response.^[9]

[6] Twenge, J. M., Campbell, W. K. & Carter, N. T. (2014). Declines in trust in others and confidence in institutions among American adults and late adolescents, 1972 – 2012. *Psychological Science*, 25(10), 1914-1923.

[7] Herring, M. P. (2010). The Effect of Exercise Training on Anxiety Symptoms Among Patients. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 170(4), 321.

[8] Luo, Y., Hawkey, L. C., Waite, L. J., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2012). Loneliness, health, and mortality in old age: A national longitudinal study. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(6), 907-914.

[9] Cole, S. W., Levine, M. E., Arevalo, J. M. G., Ma, J., Weir, D. R., & Crimmins, E. M. (2015). Loneliness, eudaimonia, and the human conserved transcriptional response to adversity. *Psycho-neuro-endocrinology*, 62, 11-17.

[10] Brooks, S. K., et al. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet*, 395(10227), 912-920.

OTHER WAYS TO STAY ENGAGED

4. Resist the Urge to Stockpile.

Our shopping choices can help make items like hand sanitizer and medical masks more readily available to those to those who need such supplies to remain safe on the job. Empty shelves can feel defeating, especially for those with tight budgets or limited purchasing choices. When shopping at the grocery store, if an item has a WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) symbol beside the price and you are not a WIC user, try to seek out an alternative option.

5. Get Informed on Changes in Local Voting.

All of this is happening in the midst of primary season in the United States. To promote constituent safety while ensuring individuals have an opportunity to practice their constitutional right to vote, many states have expanded options for voting in local elections and primaries during this time. A growing number of states have expanded exceptions for no-excuse absentee ballots, extended deadlines for mail-in ballots, or have even started offering online voting options. To stay up-to-date on voting opportunities in your state, click [here](#).

6. Participate in the 2020 Census.

Calling all United States Residents! Take advantage of your extra time and make sure to respond to the 2020 Census. This population count, which occurs once every ten years, plays an essential role in establishing each state's congressional representation, and directing budgetary decisions. Census counts determine how the federal government allocates hundreds of billions of dollars a year to local communities, **including funding for public health, disaster planning and response, infrastructure, and health care.** In addition, the census provides one of the most comprehensive datasets available within the United States and is frequently used to analyze trends and guide planning processes in communities across the nation. Click [here](#) to find out how you can respond online, by phone, or by mail.

Social distancing can be draining, but using technology and other tools to stay connected to your support system can help mitigate the very real impacts of isolation, disruption of social networks, and loss of leisure activities.^[10] We are all in this together, and while we may be physically separated, we are all working together toward a common goal of making our communities stronger and more resilient than ever.

Additional Resources

U.S. CDC: [Manage Anxiety & Stress →](#)

World Health Organization: [Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak →](#)

TIME: [How to Stay Physically and Mentally Healthy While COVID-19 Has You Stuck at Home →](#)

BBC: [Coronavirus: How to protect your mental health →](#)

For more guidance on how to apply Fitwel and contribute to building health for all™, visit [fitwel.org](https://www.fitwel.org).