

OLDER AND WISER: We all need to go the extra mile when it comes to social distancing

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Over the last week or so I have been social distancing in the face of the COVID-19 virus. It's the right thing to do, especially since I'm in a vulnerable age group.

As we all know, seniors are not able to access their usual haunts (seniors' centres, coffee shops, recreation centres and the libraries) and they cannot see their family and friends as much.

I asked colleagues, friends and family for coping strategies especially for people who do not have access to electronic devices and the internet. Bonus: This meant I was in touch with lots of people which helped me deal with my own need to socialize and stay connected.

Many people said keeping busy was crucial. Sitting around a lot might bring on anxiety, stress and social isolation. Try organizing your day by setting an agenda which includes exercise, changing or upping your usual cleaning schedule, eating a regular, healthy diet, staying socially connected, trying something different or finishing those projects that you started and never finished.

While it might seem like fun sitting around in your pajamas all day, keep up your routine by showering and dressing for the day in the morning.

Of course, keep up the old solitary activities like reading, watching your favourite shows on television and gardening. You could clean a closet, sort and organize photos, shred old papers and listen to the recording that you received for your birthday and never listened to all the way through. Consider these activities as stay at home fun activities and don't feel guilty about binge watching a Netflix series.

Try though, not to obsessively watch television or listen to the radio about the current situation – too much information can be stressful and not always very helpful.

While we cannot go to the gym or attend our regular exercise classes we can get outside for a walk, in fact everyone is encouraged to so if possible and you are able. I have been walking but keeping my distance (two metres or 6 ½ feet is suggested).

But I have also been trying to be social, smiling and nodding to people and maybe having a short distance conversation. We are so fortunate on the North Shore to have so many walking trails. For instance, try the Spirit Trail, the West Vancouver Seawall, the Kings Mill Walk, the Maplewood Conservation Area or just walk in your neighbourhood. If you can't get out, perhaps create an exercise program in your house, dust off that old exercise bike and check out exercise programs on TV.

One of the best ways to stay connected is the good old-fashioned telephone. Try phoning a friends and family regularly. Maybe get in touch with an old out of touch friend. Find out if they need anything or just have a good chin wag.

Many seniors' centres and groups are setting up phone trees or other programs to keep in touch with their members and participants. Check out the centres you went to before the virus hit if you want a regular call or you want to volunteer to phone people. To find out how to reach these groups and organizations look for the new 2020 Seniors Directory created by the North Shore Community Resources Society and published by the North Shore News.

The directory can be found on-line at nscr.ca. Also, because the Red Cross Equipment Loan program is open for business at 600 West Queens Rd., you can get a guide there.

Another way to stay socially connected is to write some letters to people by hand and let them know you will write back quickly. Drop your letters off at the good old mail- box down the street

If you use an electronic device such as a tablet or smartphone perhaps set up a photo exchange, weekly book club reading group, play Scrabble or other online games with friends and Skype or Facetime regularly. Use email and texting, but perhaps write longer emails and ask for responses.

The goal of social distancing is to eventually stop the spread of the virus. The goal for us as seniors when we are practicing social distancing is to stay hopeful, busy and still, somehow, socially connected.

I don't usually quote celebrities, but Ryan Reynolds, our homegrown Canadian star, aptly stated recently: "Take care of your bodies and hearts. Leave room for joy. Call someone who's isolated and might need connection."

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