

The Self-Isolation Survival Guide

Sandie Fredriksson is a highly sought-after health coach and the creator of 'The 8 Week Plan - Healthy Habits For Life'. She teaches women over 40 how to get in control of their health and happiness in the second half of life, without it feeling difficult.



Sandie tells us how to protect our wellbeing during this testing time, and perhaps even build new healthy habits for life

Staying home whilst so many others are fighting Coronavirus on the frontline, is absolutely essential and the least we can do. But single and alone, hemmed in with a partner who's perfecting your eye roll or tactically trying to avoid locking horns with your teenager, comes with its own set of challenges as the weeks go on.

It's early days, but so far, self-isolating with my partner, our five children (aged 11 to 17) and the dog is feeling quite manageable. Like those first heady days of Christmas, we've enjoyed spending time together playing board games, making Tik Toks and squashing up after dinner to start the nightly debate about which movie to watch. But this isn't Christmas and let's face it, we could be here a while.

Equally, if you live alone, having more time for self-care and that Netflix series you've been eyeing, may have sounded like bliss a few weeks ago. But in reality, it can start to feel very lonely very quickly, especially if you're an extrovert who thrives on a busy social calendar.

I don't know anybody who's not feeling fearful right now as we all wonder how long this will last, what the cost will be or how our lives will look on the other side. But it's important to remember that there's a big difference between the way our body responds to real day-to-day stressors and perceived stress which is the story you tell yourself about what may or may not happen in the future. Studies show that perceived stress is much more harmful to your immune system than actual stress, so now is a good time to start noticing what you are giving your attention to.

Whether you're self-isolating, in quarantine or social distancing to protect others, there's a lot you can do to stay positive and healthy. A great place to start is to get organised about how you use your time at home and build daily habits to protect your physical and mental wellbeing. Taking action in times of uncertainty can go a long way to helping you feel like you're still in the driving seat.

Embrace A Routine

It's easy to think you don't need structure now that your usual schedule has been dramatically pulled out from under you. But the truth is, having routines for yourself and your household will create certainty and predictability in a world where those feelings are now particularly lacking. If you no longer have to get up for your daily commute or school run, why not start your day with a habit that will grow your physical and mental strength, like a 20-minute home workout or a 10-minute meditation?

Even if you're not planning on being virtually seen by anyone that day, be sure to 'get up, dress up and show up' every morning for your own mental health. Transitioning from your daytime to your night-time pyjamas at 9pm is a slippery slope, so keep this pleasure for those occasional rainy Sundays!

By establishing a breakfast, lunch and dinner schedule, I've avoided a continual stream of teens looking for easy-to-grab food whenever they fancy and I've recently challenged them to plan and cook at least one of those meals each a day. We're always complaining that children aren't taught enough life skills at school, so this is my window to get them ready for Uni.

To my delight, the kids have now started coming together to do workouts in the kitchen every day. I couldn't have engineered that a few weeks ago if I paid them!



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Be Prepared But Don't Panic

The way to combat fear is by taking action. Whilst accepting the things we cannot control, there's a lot you can do to prepare for you or your loved ones getting sick.

Stock your freezer with home-cooked meals that are easy to heat up. Soups, stews and curries are simple to batch cook and will carry you through those days where you may not feel well enough to make dinner.

Make sure you have a working thermometer in the house and enough paracetamol should you have painful headaches or need to lower a fever. Speak to your GP if you are unsure how to manage symptoms, or read advice on the NHS website.

Include a teaspoon of Manuka honey in your daily diet for its antibacterial, antiviral, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. The higher the UMF (Unique Manuka Factor) the greater the benefits, so choose 10+ if your budget allows.

Shore Up Your Immune System

A strong immune system won't necessarily stop you getting Coronavirus, but it can take the edge of your symptoms and increase your chances of a speedy recovery. Once you get in the habit of prioritising this, it will improve your ability to cope with any future illnesses.

Stay hydrated with a target of at least two litres of water a day and look at getting a filter jug if you don't already have one.

Eliminate (or at least reduce) added sugars, and don't succumb to drinking rosé every afternoon just because you might instinctually feel like you're on holiday. Consider taking daily supplements such as Vitamins C and D and research echinacea and elderberry extract for immune boosting support.

Find ways to laugh! Watch a funny movie, plug in to a comedy podcast, or follow a feel-good Instagram feed. Adopt a new habit to counteract the chemical effects of stress on your body, like guided breathwork, a meditation app or a free online yoga session on Youtube.

Fall In Love With Cooking

If you're used to winging what you eat every day or you're a little too over-reliant on Deliveroo, then now is the time to fall in love with cooking at home. Planning and preparing healthy meals in your own kitchen is the ultimate quality control and a habit that your future self will thank you for.

A top tip I've discovered is that restaurant suppliers are struggling to know what to do with their produce. I've found several that are welcoming the opportunity to deliver to homes in my area, so ask around and do a little bit of online research to see what you can find. I've just received my order from Ben's Fish Limited who usually supply some of London's top eateries. They told me that this new customer base has been so successful they are now planning to make it a permanent part of their business model.

Not being able to get my hands on our usual grocery list has pushed me to get more creative. I've gone back to some of my old cookbooks and discovered some interesting new recipes online. Self-isolation could be a great time to shake up the dinners you currently have on rotation.

Move Your Body

Presuming you're well enough, make sure you move your

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body every day. And if you already know you need to be doing more exercise, please don't let self-isolation be another excuse to put it off.

Gyms shutting and public classes being cancelled means there have never been more options for home workouts. If you have a favourite barre or yoga class, check what they're doing now as many of them have taken their sessions online.

Walking and running are great options, and still actively encouraged - as long as you stick to social distancing rules. Plug into some loud music for an easy mood booster, something we all need right now, and getting outside has excellent health benefits, including supporting your immune system. If you've never tried running before then start slowly, you might just be at the start of a lifelong habit.

Prioritise Sleep

A good night's sleep is another important pillar to boosting your immune system as well as restoring your energy and improving your resilience. But when the rhythm of your life gets turned on its head, it can make you feel unsafe and anxious. It's time to get strategic about how you prioritise your sleep.

Observe how much coffee you are drinking - you may find it's more now that you're at home most of the day. Maybe stock up on some herbal teas and get into the habit of reaching for those instead.

Alcohol can really affect the quality of your sleep so get honest about your intake. A combination of boredom and the fact you don't need to be up so early can make it harder to comply with your usual boundaries.

Give yourself a sensible bedtime with a one hour opportunity to fall asleep. Shut off all screens two hours before bed and create a habit that calms your central nervous system: have a warm bath, drink herbal tea, lower the lights, meditate, read a book.

Using a rhythmic breath pattern is a nifty trick I like to recommend to my clients: inhaling for four seconds then exhaling for six will move you into a state of rest and relaxation and as an added bonus, the counting will also help to distract you from your thoughts.

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Something I've been trying to resist is staying glued to the current 24-hour news cycle and instead, I aim to watch just one news bulletin a day. You might find that giving yourself a break from what is predominantly negative newsflow right now can reduce your anxiety and improve your sleep.

Stay Connected

Over the last two weeks, I've felt more connected to my friends than ever, putting time in our diaries to meet on the Houseparty app for some low-effort, face-to-face communication.

Meanwhile, street WhatsApp groups are popping up all over the place and I'm loving the community spirit in my neighbourhood. We've been sharing our supply of bread and eggs, splitting Ocado slots and keeping spirits lifted by the inevitable toilet paper jokes. Helping others around you can go a long way to shifting that sense of hopelessness you might be feeling with your normal life is on hold.

Then there's the connection to those in your home. My kids are definitely starting to struggle with not going out and seeing their friends. Whilst I may not be their first choice to hang with, we are all working hard to make the best of it and I'm feeling grateful for the opportunity to deepen our connections.



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At some point, this strange time will be over and we will be able to hug our friends again. We might even find more happiness in simple pleasures, like having lunch in a restaurant, working out in a gym or getting our roots done in a salon. And we will forever be indebted to our wonderful and brave NHS heroes, for putting their lives on the line for all of us.

To find out more about health coaching with Sandie Fredriksson, visit sandiefredriksson.com