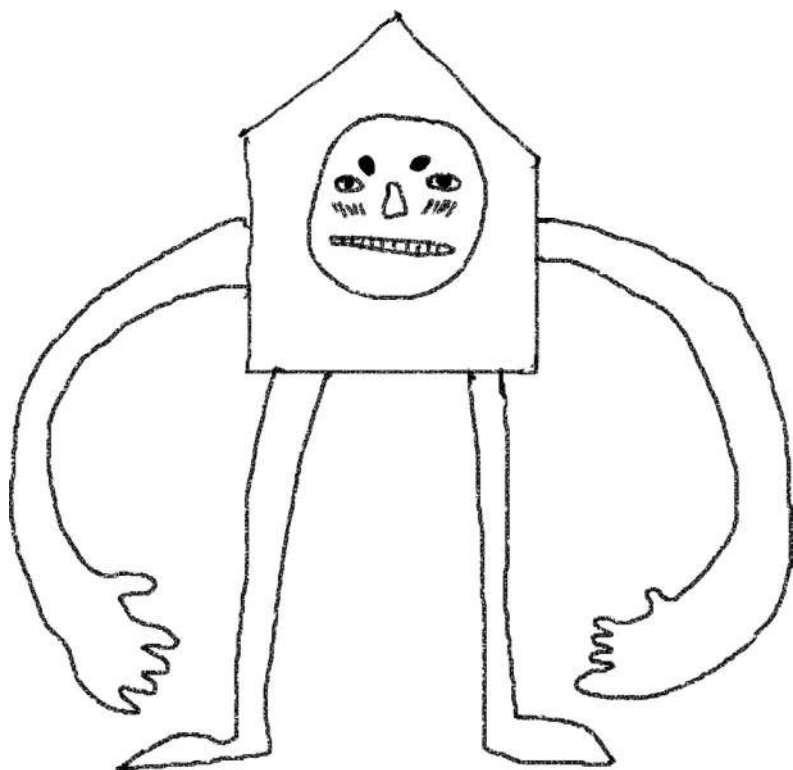


Coping with being housebound



The advice in this zine is for people who are currently housebound due to the coronavirus quarantines. The advice is based on what I've learned from over a year housebound suffering from M.E., and previous sporadic bouts of houseboundness due to depression and agoraphobia. These are some ways of coping that have improved how I deal with that, based on managing your behaviour and mental health. This is not going to make houseboundness painless for you but it might help you cope.

This zine is based on a thread I posted on Mastodon. My Mastodon account is **@alex@godforsaken.website**. Several other people contributed their advice in the thread, and their contributions appear in this zine attributed to their Mastodon account handles. All other text without attribution is by me (@alex).

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Depression

Firstly, most importantly: if you have been told to stay indoors in isolation, what you are being asked to do is to adopt the lifestyle of a severely depressed person. Because of that you are going to start experiencing symptoms of depression.

It's helpful to recognise when you're having episodes of this – i.e. consciously think to yourself:

Why am I feeling so terrible right now?

It's because I'm having depression.

Time to look after myself.

If you have or have had depression, you might have coping mechanisms in place to deal with this. If this is new to you, there's a lot of good advice floating around online for dealing with depression. It's important to notice when this is happening to you, because being conscious of it is a first step in dispelling it.

Time

Time is going to get weird. Days are going to blend into each other. Your body-clock is going to be deprived of a lot of the physiological cues you get from going outside and having a routine.

You're going to need to artificially supplement or recreate the cues you would normally get, and also increase your exposure to any outside cues available.

So there's three important ways to deal with this that I'm going to elaborate on in the next few posts:

- Reinforce your day-night cycle.
- Set yourself a permissive routine and stick to it.
- Keep your places separate.

These all ultimately aim to do variations on the same thing: compartmentalise your behaviours into different contexts to prevent everything from blurring into one interminable slog.

Reinforce your day-night cycle.

Your body responds to sunlight, and uses it to calibrate when it thinks day and night is. If you're stuck indoors you're going to get less of this effect, even if you have sunlight coming in.

You're going to have to set yourself an artificial day-night cycle.

One of the worst things for depression is to feel like one day bleeds into the next with restless sleep in between – so the goal is to make daytime feel as different from nighttime as possible.

- In the morning, as soon as you're up, open all the curtains and leave them open all day. Get as much sunlight in as possible.
- In the evening, put the lights on low. No ceiling lights, just lamps or whatever you have around. This is your lead-in to night time.
- At night, close all the curtains, have the lights as low as possible. If it's dark outside, make it dark inside.

If it's safe to do so where you live, have your windows open a little 24/7. This will expose you to more cues like air temperature and outdoor noise, and will keep your air circulating.

Separate your activities by time of day. Do stuff that wakes you up in the morning, and stuff that calms you down in the evening. This sounds basic, but you have to do the basic stuff as deliberately as you can. Your body and mind respond to these basic cues and the goal is to consciously reinforce these cues. You want your mornings and evenings to feel as different as possible, so that you can feel like you're opening up for the day every morning and closing things up at night.

Vitamin D

Take vitamin D. It'll disappear quickly from your system as soon as you stop getting direct outdoor sunlight, and you'll feel like crap. If you're already taking vitamin D you can increase the dosage slightly. If you do go up to a higher dose, keep a look out for potential side effects such as nausea, which are a sign you should go back down to a lower dose.

- @alex@godforsaken.website

If you dont usually get a heck of a lot of vitamin D, i would recommend against jumping up to a high dose - take it a bit gradual.

Check what the supermarket dose is. At 1,000iu i would suggest starting off on twice a week for 1-2 weeks, as in some (possibly many? Idk how common) individuals jumping up to a high dose can cause hypomania / hyperactivity.

I do endorse taking vit D, and try to do in the morning / early arvo.

- @certifiedperson@weirder.earth

I would also add - supplement magnesium, and Vitamin C as well if you're not able to get enough of that from food.

I had to have high-dose Vitamin D a couple of years ago, and found out the hard way that magnesium is "used up" processing the Vitamin D, which results in godawful headaches, muscle cramps, and the like.

- @dartigen@mastodon.social

Exercise

- @signaltonoise@linernotes.club

Regarding exercises: if your physical health allows it I strongly recommend to make yourself some kind of a routine. Nothing exhaustive, just any physical activity you can do, preferably at the same time everyday.

Personally I've found Qi Gong very helpfull and fun to do. I've practiced daily for a few years now and it made my life much, much better.

It's relatively easy to start and doesn't require a lot of space.

There are a lot of routines and practices on YouTube so just give it a try

And if Qi Gong is not your thing I'm sure you can find something better for yourself and make it a habit.

- @signaltonoise@linernotes.club

Cooking and a sense of achievement

- @vilaeloise@lgbtqia.is

It helps also to have both a sense of achievement and a thing to look forward every day.

Achievement might be anything that makes us feel we have done something with our time: learning/practising a skill, repairs or sewing, doing art, etc. It's better if those are things outside our regular jobs under capitalism, something that we do for ourselves or loved ones. Long term reclusion is more bearable if we can feel it hasn't been a total waste of time, and for that we need objective proof, like things we created or measurable skills.

A thing to look forward can be anything pleasurable: tea time in the evening, a tv show episode or two (but better avoid binge watching for hours every day), reading, board games... Little amounts of "unhealthy" things like comfort foods or sweets are ok in moderation as long as 80-90% of our habits are healthy enough. Pleasure is important to keep neurotransmitters balanced and remind us life can be good.

Also, try to cook something every day, or if you have low energy, at least do some batch cooking every 2-3 days. Having pleasurable healthy homemade food that feels freshly made it's an important part of feeling well.

About cooking (which might be also a skill to learn if you weren't good at it) people feeling already depressed might want to do some search for "spoonie recipes". Disabled/spoonie/chronically ill communities have a lot of shared advice on preparing healthy very low effort meals.

A basic thing for this, in my personal experience, is to prioritise cooking whenever we have the energy to do so or just before running out of energy for the day, because food will be needed later. So if you start feeling the first effects of fatigue/low mood/whatever, leave other stuff for later, cook and then rest. Better to cook big quantities for at least 3-4 servings of the same food and keep it in the fridge or freeze it for the next days.

A good low effort way of cooking that also makes it feel more simple, fast and enjoyable is to make big batches of basic staples (boiled potatoes, boiled eggs, plain white rice, vegetables, etc) and keep them in tupperware until we need them, then cooking them in a pan or pot with a bit of oil/butter, spices, etc, adding then the rest of stuff (like chicken, meat, tempeh, seitan, etc) until all flavours get mixed.

Try to plan half a dozen or so of basic recipes like this (for example a couple different potato based stews, a couple rice/pasta dishes, etc) and keep rotating them along the week, experimenting as often as possible with different combinations or spices, don't let meals become boring.

- @vilaeloise@lgbtqia.is

Set yourself a permissive routine

Instead of setting a strict routine like “do X at 12pm”, set yourself times that you do things **after**. This is to stop yourself deciding to just eat dinner any time because you’re bored, or to crawl into bed because you’re bored. Food and bed are **powerful forces** when you’re stuck indoors – be strict with yourself about them.

So for example don’t eat lunch until (e.g.) **after** 12, even if you’re hungry before then. Don’t go to bed before (e.g.) 10pm, even if you’re tired. You’ll sleep better.

The exception to this is getting up in the morning. Set yourself a time **before** which you’re going to wake up, and an additional time before which you’re going to get out of bed.

Even if you feel like you’ve had an unsatisfying sleep, get up. You’ll make the feeling worse by staying in bed. Let it go, and start the day in spite of it. You’re going to have some bad sleeps while you’re living this way.

Mealtimes and bedtime are the main time landmarks in your housebound day. Stick to them even if you don't feel like it. Think about when you're on a long-haul flight and your perception of time is getting messed up and the attendants bring you meals at set times because they know better than you. You eat the meals when you're given them.

If you have other daily practices such as praying or exercising, you likely already have a set time for these that you don't need to adjust. These are other good landmarks to keep track of your day.

Keep your places separate

Keep things in their room. Don't move stuff from room to room. This helps:

- To make your space feel as big as possible.
- To simulate having to go to places to do things.
- To stop you from just bringing everything back to bed and stewing there.

For example I keep my laptop charger plugged in in the living room, and it doesn't move from there, so I can only use my computer from the sofa (or if i take it to bed i can only use it until the battery runs out). I have a chair I read in, I have a table I eat at, I have a desk I do creative stuff at. None of this stuff moves anywhere else, I have to go to it. If you work from home, have a dedicated spot where you work. If you exercise, have a place for that.

This is mentally similar to your day-night cycle thing – you don't want everything to blend into each other.

Finally

Finally: expect this to hurt. Being shut-in like this is not a good lifestyle for a human being, and the coping strategies are there to soften the worse parts of it. There is no sustainable long-term way to do this.