

# Teen to Teen: Staying Connected and Healthy in a Time of Distress

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## COVID has been especially hard for teenagers

As we approach month 7 of quarantine, the effects of COVID are hitting harder than ever. The beginning of the school year is usually marked by Friday Night Football games, the Homecoming dance, and back to school festivities. Our lack of social interaction accompanied by staring at a computer screen all day has had devastating impacts on teen mental health. Teens are plagued with feelings of depression and hopelessness, but it is important to remember that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. We will get through this, but for now, here are some things we can do to keep ourselves positive and healthy.

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## Battling quarantine depression and isolation

### Physically

First and foremost, exercise is important. It can be hard to pull yourself off the couch but keeping in shape is essential to the health of our minds and bodies. Exercise helps us feel better. Experts say that we need about 30 minutes of exercise a day to release BDNF, which helps our brains learn and adapt. If you can't exercise, it's important to still get outside. Spending some time in the fresh air and under the UV light is great for your mental health. Exposure to ultraviolet light affects your mood and allows your brain to release endorphins. In addition, it is important to get enough sleep each night. Your body needs to go through 5-6 sleep cycles per night for optimal rest, which equates to 7.5-9 hours of sleep per night. Try to go to bed and wake up at a consistent time every day for better results. Lastly, eat healthy. This seems basic, but what we eat does make a huge impact on how we feel. Eating healthy foods helps us to stay healthy physically and mentally.

### Mentally

Humans are social beings; we need to interact with others to be happy. While we all know that it is important to stay in touch with friends and family, it can be hard to feel connected when we aren't seeing them in real life. Facetime, Skype, and Zoom are great programs for seeing people face to face and getting the real-time experience. With the Netflix party feature, you can watch movies together at the same time! We also can feel good by doing good things for other people. If you live nearby your friends and family, it can be fun to bake cookies or leave a little note on their front step to make their day. On a smaller scale, giving a hug to those closest to you can have a huge impact! Hugging can lower your risk of anxiety, depression, and illness, but make sure you're careful about who you hug because it can also spread the virus! Next, take breaks. COVID is already stressful enough and balancing online school and extracurriculars on top of it can feel impossible at times. It's okay to get your mind off things for a little bit and allow yourself to recharge. Remember to take care of yourself first and don't get frustrated with yourself for struggling. Lastly, remember that this is not forever. There will come a time when life will return to normal, even if it doesn't feel like it right now. Keep preserving, we are all in this together!

