

Coping with Quarantine

Quarantine, sometimes called “social distancing,” is an imposed isolation or restricted movement. It is commonly used to prevent the spread of illness, such as the 2020 outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19). But quarantine can also occur for more common events such the recovery from a common illness or medical procedure or following a weather emergency or natural disaster.

Regardless of the cause, being socially isolated or having our movements restricted against our will can be a source of stress. Emotional reactions can be worsened when:

- A quarantine is due to a threat to our health, safety or well-being
- We have limited information and control
- The isolation is unpredictable or prolonged
- There is a history of mental health problems, substance abuse or social and financial instability.

The goals for coping with a quarantine are to maintain our health, cope with the stress and build resilience so we are ready to bounce back and resume our lives once the quarantine has ended.

What to expect

The good news is that we are resilient. With the right response, we can tolerate a lot and bounce back from most stressful events. We all deal with uncertainty and stress in different ways. We interpret events differently and express emotions in unique ways. Stress impacts our behaviors differently, particularly depending on how severely an event impacts our lives.

During a quarantine, it is natural to feel:

- Concern over your own or others' health status
- Anger and irritation directed at the cause for, or response to, the quarantine
- Embarrassment and stigma of being ill, or being quarantined
- Impatience or anxiety related to health monitoring
- Worry about the impact to your job
- Stress about taking care of basic needs such shopping, attending class or religious activities or going to medical appointments
- Concern about taking care of children or other family members
- Loneliness or feeling cut off from the rest of the world
- Boredom and restlessness
- The desire to excessively use alcohol, or overeat
- Depression, anxiety and fear
- Helpless and powerlessness
- Changes in patterns of sleep and eating (too much or too little)

Be prepared. Have a plan.

Coping with a period of quarantine can be easier if you are prepared:

- If you are experiencing health problems, follow the instructions of your healthcare providers.
- For larger-scale social quarantines, follow the instructions from those in authority.
- Stay knowledgeable through reputable sources in your country. Separate facts from your emotions, imagined fears, and “worst case scenario” thinking.
- Limit exposure to news and social media. Instead, monitor the situation through government websites such as, the World Health Organization; the Public Health Agency of Canada; the US Centers for Disease Control (USCDC); the Australian Chief Medical Officer; the UK National Health Service.
- Plan for continued care with your healthcare providers, perhaps using home visits or telemedicine. Ensure you have refills of medication and necessary healthcare supplies, including a thermometer.
- Have ample food, particularly non-perishable items.
- Talk with friends and family about ways you will communicate.
- Plan with those nearby to support each other, such as sharing supplies or replenishing groceries for those in need.
- Plan for ways to pay your bills while are isolated.
- Plan ways to prevent boredom, particularly you are quarantined alone. Use digital technology and social media. Work from home. If the family is quarantined, involve everyone in plans for entertainment.
- Talk with your supervisor about work continuity during your absence.

Managing stress and building resilience

Quarantines are often out of our control, which can produce stress, anxiety and frustration. Even during a period of quarantine, there is a lot we can do to manage the stress, build resilience and be ready to bounce back after it's over.

- Focus your energy on the things you can control. Avoid obsessing over things you can't control. Stay optimistic, particularly with children.
- Follow all instructions for maintaining personal health and safety. Prioritize the medical needs of all involved.
- Establish new routines, including waking, meals, socialization and bedtimes.
- Eat a healthy diet and stay as physically active as possible.
- Stay socially connected. But be aware when others are worsening your anxiety.
- Stay connected to family and friends who are far away or living abroad. Use social media as a tool to monitor the well-being of others.
- If you are quarantined as a family, structure time to both socialize and be away from each other. Play games. Watch movies. But it's also OK to have time away from each other.

- Expect emotions to vary from day to day. It is OK to have moments of frustration and worry.
- Keep up with hobbies and things you enjoy. Use this time for self-care and positive distraction. Engage in activities you have not had time for in the past.
- Don't reply too much on digital distractions. Get outside as much as possible.
- Avoid self-destructive ways of coping, such as excessive alcohol, drug use, overeating.
- Express your feelings as they arise. Allow others to comfort you.
- Accept that stress, emotions and conflicts will occur. Try to resolve conflicts quickly.
- Talk to a counselor by phone if the feelings become prolonged or too intense

For Children

- Minimize exposure to news, adult conversations and social media.
- Ask children what they have seen or heard. Be prepared to correct faulty information.
- Encourage children to say how they are feeling about the event
- Assure children that their parents and adults are taking care of them and will continue to help them deal with anything that makes them feel afraid
- Help children recognize past times when they have shown courage in coping with a new scary situation. This will help empower and increase self-esteem.
- Let children know these events occur occasionally. Be optimistic. Let them know that many people are working to resolve the situation.

Crises and broad social emergencies of any kind can be stressful. If you are experiencing severe or persistent symptoms lasting longer than a few weeks, contact your Employee Assistance Program. Counselors are available 24/7. In most instances counseling is available by phone.

Remember that wherever you are, Caterpillar's confidential **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** is available and accessible 24/7/365.

 **1-309-820-3604**

 **1-866-228-0565**

 **CaterpillarEAP.com**
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