

Physical distancing activities for families and adults



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Tips and tricks for keeping your body and mind occupied during self- isolation

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What is physical distancing?

Physical distancing is the practice of leaving space between you and other people when you are outside of your home. It has been proven to be one of the most effective ways for people to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak of a virus or illness (such as during the current COVID-19 outbreak). But what exactly does this look like in real life?

According to Health Canada, physical distancing means:¹

- Avoiding crowded places and gatherings
- Avoiding common greetings such as handshakes
- Limiting contact with people at higher risk (e.g. older adults and those in poor health)
- Keeping a distance of at least two arms length (approximately 2 metres) from others as much as possible

A major factor in physical distancing is the act of staying at home as much as possible. Doing this can be hard for almost everyone because it means limiting our in-person social interactions – but it is a very important part of helping public health departments contain a virus or illness.

1. Physical distancing: How to slow the spread of COVID-19. Health Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/social-distancing.html>. Accessed: June 22, 2020.

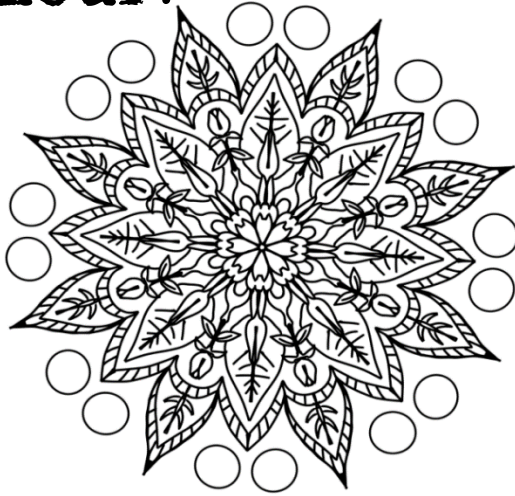
The purpose of this guide

We know that not everyone experiences physical distancing or self-isolation the same way: some people live with others and are never alone; some live by themselves and crave interaction with others; some live in small apartments in the city, while others live in the country with lots of wide open spaces to explore.

The one thing that we all have in common, though, is the need to find activities that will help us fill our time in enjoyable ways – even if sometimes that is easier said than done. To encourage you to find enjoyable ways to pass the time in the coming months, we have put together this little guide. We hope it will help you to fill your time and, who knows, maybe you will discover a new hobby or passion along the way!



Colour!



Adult colouring may seem like something new and trendy, but it goes back to the time of renowned psychologist Carl Jung. Jung believed that colouring mandalas could help patients experience many of the benefits of meditation, such as inner calm and self-realization, and he was known for prescribing this activity to his patients.¹

Psychology Today even says that colouring can help improve your mood, enhance your sense of mindfulness, and reduce mental health stress² – all benefits we could use during a time of self-isolation! So, why not pick up a picture and some crayons, and put some colour into your “physically distanced” world?

Psst: Don’t think you need special, high-quality supplies for colouring – regular wax or pencil crayons will do just fine and any kind of colouring picture will work too. There are millions available for free online, or you could even create your own!

Looking for some fun, Townships-inspired colouring pages to get you started? Visit <https://www.eastertownships.org/blogs-and-articles> to find links to colouring pages inspired by Sherbrooke’s murals and the Townships’ churches.

1. Martinez, Nikki Dr. 7 Reasons Adult Coloring Books Are Great for Your Mental, Emotional and Intellectual Health. Huff Post. November 24, 2015. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/7-reasons-adult-coloring-books-are-great-for-your-mental-emotional-and-intellectual-health_n_8626136. Accessed: March 18, 2019.
2. Ali, Shaimna. “Are Adult Colouring Books Actually Helpful?”. Psychology Today. March 27, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/modern-mentality/201803/are-adult-coloring-books-actually-helpful>. Accessed: April 16, 2020.



Start a gratitude journal

It is a proven fact that focusing on the things we are grateful for can have a positive impact on our lives. According to Happify Daily, gratitude journaling can:¹

- Increase positivity
- Improve self-esteem
- Help you sleep better
- Make you happier
- Reduce stress

Sounds good, doesn't it?



Photo by Negative Space on Pexels

During these times of uncertainty and quietness, consider setting aside a few minutes daily (or weekly, if you prefer) to fill a gratitude journal with all of the things you have to be grateful for... you'll likely be surprised at all the wonderful things you have in your life!

Here are a few tips to get you started:

- ♥ Pick a notebook or pen that you love – it may seem silly, but it will really help you stick with your journaling habit! Neither need to be fancy, but they should be ones you like.
- ♥ Pick a time or two in the day when you can sit down and focus on your journaling. According to Intelligent Change, good times to write in a gratitude journal are first thing in the morning and last thing at night – think of your journaling times as “book ends” for your day. A good tip for making this possible is to keep your journal near your bed!²
- ♥ Set yourself a goal of how many things you want to add to your gratitude list each day. It can be 3, 5, 10 – the choice is yours!
- ♥ Try to go beyond the surface level when writing – think about why you are grateful for the thing you mention, how it makes you feel, what is special about it. For example, if you are grateful for breakfast, say why – maybe you really love cinnamon-raisin bagels and knowing there are some waiting for you on the counter makes you excited to wake up and eat!

To learn more about gratitude journaling, check out Intelligent Change's *“The Ultimate Gratitude Journal Guide (including benefits, how to keep one, prompts, and best journals)”* – find the link below.

1. Cohen, Yoni. 5 Reasons Keeping a Gratitude Journal Will Change Your Life. Happify Daily. <https://www.happify.com/hd/why-you-should-write-a-gratitude-journal/>. Accessed: April 21, 2020.
2. Evans, Kevin. The Ultimate Gratitude Journal Guide (including benefits, how to keep one, prompts, and best journals). Intelligent Change. <https://www.intelligentchange.com/blogs/news/the-ultimate-guide-to-keeping-a-gratitude-journal>. Accessed: April 21, 2020.

Have a picnic... indoors or outdoors!



Picnics are one of the best parts of summer – packing a special lunch in a picnic basket and heading off to eat it somewhere different from your kitchen table always feel a little bit special!

So why not take advantage of a nice day this summer and head outside to your yard for a picnic with your family members or your pets?

If you can't get outside for a picnic, don't worry – just have one right in your house! Pick a new room to eat your lunch or dinner in – maybe have lunch on your living room floor, or supper in your bedroom! Consider adding some fun things into the mix too – happy music, fun hats or scarves, special food, or anything else to make the event a little bit special.



We are fortunate in the Eastern Townships to have spectacularly clear skies in which to view the stars at night... why not take advantage of this opportunity and head out to gaze at the night sky?

Not only will you have a chance to get out of the house and get some fresh air, but you will also get to see a glimpse of the great, big universe that surrounds us.

You do not even need to live out in the country to make this happen either –

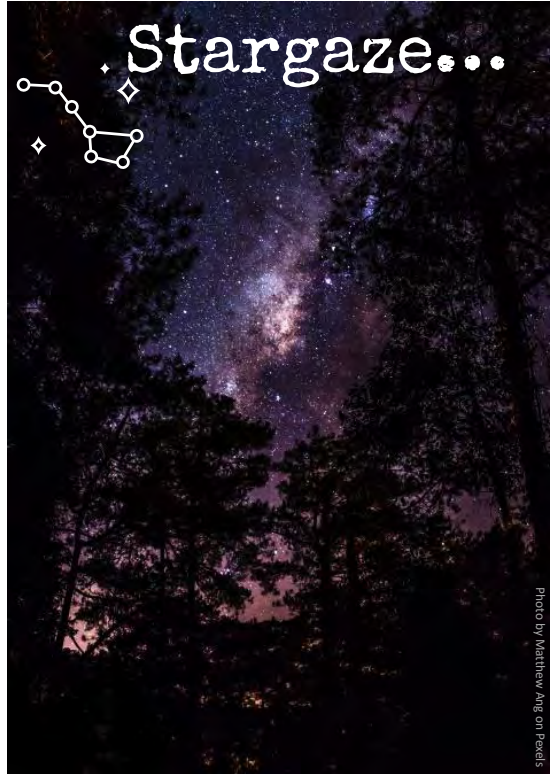
chances are, you will be able to spot a few special stars and constellations right from your balcony or driveway!

Here are some stars and constellations to look out for:

- ★ Polaris (The North Star)
- ★ The Big Dipper
- ★ Ursa Major (The Great Bear)
- ★ Ursa Minor (The Little Bear)
- ★ Orion, The Hunter
- ★ Canis Major, The Great Dog

Visit the following websites for tips to make your stargazing experience even better:

1. Constellations of the Night Sky: Famous Star Patterns Explained (Images). Space.com. <https://www.space.com/23309-constellations-night-sky-star-patterns-images.html>. Accessed: April 21, 2020.
2. Boeckmann, Catherine. Stargazing: Finding the Stars and Constellations. The Old Farmer's Almanac. <https://www.almanac.com/content/stargazing-finding-stars-and-constellations>. Accessed: April 21, 2020.



Try a new recipe (or two!)



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on Unsplash

Whether you are an experienced home cook or your idea of cooking involves making toast, you might want to take some time in the coming months to put on your apron and test out a new recipe or two!

According to Canada's Food Guide, cooking and preparing food can help you support healthy eating habits and is a great way to pick up new skills. By cooking more, you will also find you rely less on processed foods, you can adapt your recipes to your tastes, and you will save some money.¹

And there is no better time to get start than now! The summer and fall months in the Eastern Townships offer up an abundance of delicious, fresh, locally produced ingredients that can help anyone make master chef-worthy dishes to please even the pickiest of eaters – or pretty-up your Instagram feed. Plus, you will be helping to support businesses and farmers right here in the Townships. So, what are you waiting for? It's time to get cooking!

Want some tips to help you eat healthy, cook more, and save time and money? Looking for some recipe inspiration? Visit the Canada Food Guide website: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.

1. Canada's Food Guide: Cook More Often. Health Canada. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/cook-more-often/>. Accessed: April 23, 2020.



Grow something



There are few feelings that are better than getting outside in the nice weather and digging your hands in freshly tilled earth, planting seeds, and anxiously awaiting the growth of your own home-grown vegetables and herbs. But did you know that getting outside and gardening can have several mental health benefits too?

According to Happiness.com¹, gardening can help:

- ✔ Provide stress relief
- ✔ Ground us and strengthen our connections with nature and with others
- ✔ Make us be more present in the moment
- ✔ Give us a sense of purpose
- ✔ Keep us in shape
- ✔ And more!

Many people think they do not have the space or the time for gardening, but that is not necessarily true. Happiness.com tells us that studies show you don't need lots of space to plant gardens, and you don't even need to spend many hours outside in a garden to benefit from the activity – even a window box with herbs (or a tomato plant on your porch) can offer you some of these same benefits. There is no better time than now to pick up some seeds or plants and enjoy the many benefits of gardening!

1. Marques, Dee. The 7 Mental Health Benefits of Gardening. Happiness.com. <https://www.happiness.com/en/magazine/health-body/mental-health-benefits-gardening/>. Accessed: April 23, 2020.



Have you ever been driving or riding in a car when a cheerful, upbeat song came on the radio and made your day feel brighter? Maybe you sang along for a bit, kept time on the steering wheel, or danced around in your seat? And when the song was over, you had a big smile on your face... well, that was no accident!

According to an article published by Harvard Medical School, “bright, cheerful music can make people of all ages feel happy, energetic, and alert, and music even has a role in lifting the mood of people with depressive illness.”¹

In addition to making you feel happy and energetic, music can also²:

- ♪ Improve cognitive abilities
- ♪ Relieve stress and anxiety
- ♪ Alleviate symptoms of depression
- ♪ Improve memory
- ♪ Help insomnia
- ♪ Increase your motivation

And, with news like that, who would not want to take a few minutes to get lost in the music? During these times of self-isolation and quietness, we encourage you to put on some old records or CDs or make a fun playlist for yourself (or to share with others!) and enjoy all the benefits that listening to music can offer.

1. Music and health. Harvard Health Publishing; Harvard Medical School. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/music-and-health>. Accessed: April 23, 2020.
2. My Best Subwoofer. 6 Miraculous Psychological Benefits of Listening Music. Thrive Global. <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/6-miraculous-psychological-benefits-of-listening-music/>. Accessed: April 23, 2020.

Have a dance party!



Photo by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

It doesn't matter what age you are, there's always something fun about letting loose and dancing to a fun song with a great beat... whether you are at a party or alone in your living room, something about dancing just seems to help us put away our cares for a bit and enjoy ourselves. The best part: dancing has a whole bunch of great physical, mental, and emotional health benefits too! These include: better balance and strength,

cardiovascular health, cognitive performance, and more.¹ While you are at home, why not put some music on and dance out your frustrations, boredom, or anxiety?

A few fun songs to dance to: (chosen by our staff and board members!)

- ♪ Better When I'm Dancing, Meghan Trainor
- ♪ Brave, Sara Bareilles
- ♪ Cha-Cha Slide, Mr. C The Slide Man
- ♪ Cupid Shuffle, Cupid
- ♪ Dance, Amos J.
- ♪ Footloose, Kenny Loggins
- ♪ Happy, Pharrell Williams
- ♪ I Will Survive, Gloria Gaynor
- ♪ Look for the Good, Jason Mraz
- ♪ Mony, Mony, Tommy James & the Shondells (or Billy Idol)
- ♪ Shake it Off, Taylor Swift
- ♪ Twist & Shout, The Beatles
- ♪ The Git Up, Blanco Brown
- ♪ The Twist, Chubby Checkers








1. Lindberg, Sara. 8 Benefits of Dance. Healthline.com. <https://www.healthline.com/health/fitness-exercise/benefits-of-dance#benefits-for-kids>. Accessed: April 23, 2020.



If you are a reader, you know the joy of holding a new book in your hands, and the sense of possibility and excitement that you feel each time you start a new book...

If you aren't a book lover, you might not know this feeling yet – but this time of physical distancing could be just the opportunity you were looking for to find **THAT** one book that will make you a reader. After all, Maya Angelou once said “if you don't like to read, you haven't found the right book”¹. And what better time is there to find it than now?

“Why start now?” you might be asking... well, it is simple! Not only is reading fun and good for your brain, but it also has significant benefits for your health and well-being. According to Healthline.com², reading can:

-  Increase your ability to empathize with others
-  Build your vocabulary
-  Help prevent age-related cognitive decline
-  Reduce stress
-  Prepare you for a good night's sleep
-  Help alleviate symptoms of depression
-  ... and it may even help you live longer!

So, what are you waiting for? Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Call your local bookstore or library to see if they offer online orders, deliveries, or book borrowing services.
- Explore online e-book services such as Bookbub or Kobo to discover a vast range of ebooks for your reading pleasure (some are even free!).
- Check out a service like Libro.fm that will allow you to purchase and listen to audiobooks while also supporting your local bookstore.

1. Pino, Kristina. 11 Author Quotations to Help Reluctant Readers Find Their Way. Book Riot. <https://bookriot.com/2014/06/16/11-author-quotations-to-help-reluctant-readers-find-their-way/>. Accessed: June 22, 2020.

2. Benefits of Reading Books: How It Can Positively Affect Your Life. <https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-reading-books>. Accessed : May 4, 2020.



Stretch!



Photo by Katee Lue on Unsplash

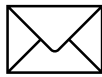
In today's world, we spend a lot of time sitting – in our cars, in our office chairs, at the dinner table, on the couch... and all this sitting can take a toll on our bodies. When we add this to the fact that our muscles become less flexible as we age,¹ some daily acts like walking, lifting our arms above our heads, and even turning our head to park a car, can become more difficult. Regular stretching can help you improve your balance and prevent falls, increase your flexibility, and help to relieve arthritis, back and knee pain, and more.¹

According to Prevention magazine, stretching may:²

- Increase blood flow through your entire body (including your brain!)
- Help fine-muscle coordination (and balance)
- Relieve stiff muscles and joints
- Improve your range of motion and mobility
- Help get your body ready for exercise
- Lower your blood pressure
- Relieve stress and relax tight muscles

Not sure where to start? Take a look at the stretching videos offered by Harvard Medical School: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/everyday-stretching>.

1. Everyday Stretching. Harvard Health Publishing. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/everyday-stretching>. Accessed: April 21, 2020.
2. Wahlgren, Kara. 7 Amazing Things That Happen to Your Body When You Stretch Every Day. Prevention.com. <https://www.prevention.com/fitness/a20515035/benefits-of-stretching-every-day/>. Accessed: April 21, 2020.



Send a letter

There is something calming about letter writing – this simple action gives the letter writer a moment of peace and quiet in a hectic world, and it helps them connect to another person – no matter how



Photo by Suzy Hazelwood from Pexels

close (or far away) they might be. With the increasing popularity of electronic communications, regular letter writing is becoming less and less common... but it does not have to be that way!

What better time is there than now to put pen to paper and re-connect with someone you know? Take a break from zoom meetings and social media chatting and try writing an old-fashioned letter – you might be surprised by just how personal and special that one simple action feels.

Taking just a few minutes out of your day to write a short note to someone you haven't seen in a while – maybe an elderly relative, an old school friend, or a teacher you loved – could have some hidden benefits¹:

- ✍ It is a great way to add happiness to someone's day! (Yours included... 😊)
- ✍ It is a great opportunity to use your creativity and playfulness: you can use fun notepaper and pens, stickers, coloured markers, and more to make your note stand out.
- ✍ It promotes mindfulness by making you slow down and carefully consider what you write – remember, there is no delete button when you write by hand!
- ✍ It encourages self-reflection and offers you a chance to process and deal with your thoughts and feelings as you are writing.

Not sure who to write to or where to start?

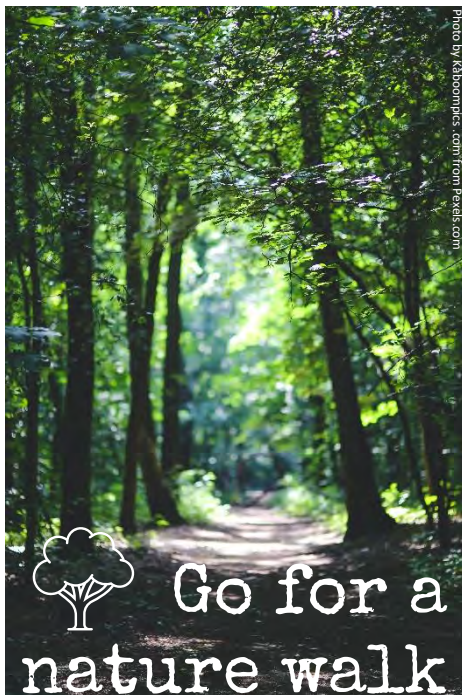
- ✍ Pick up some pretty notecards (or, better yet, make your own!), and send a quick note to a relative you have not seen in a while or a neighbour or friend in your community.
- ✍ Contact a local seniors' residence to see if you can send a letter (or a few!) to their residents. After all, this simple gesture could change someone's whole day!
- ✍ Check out www.moreloveletters.com – an international organization that sends notes of positivity and encouragement to people in the USA and countries around the world – and look through their monthly letter requests to find someone you could send a little note of encouragement or support to!

1. The benefits of writing letters. MindFood. <https://www.mindfood.com/article/benefits-of-handwriting-letters/>. Accessed: May 4, 2020.

If you are feeling anxious or stressed, why not try taking a short walk outside in nature? Take some time to admire the greenery around you, listen to the sound of birds singing, and breathe in the fresh, clean air...

According to Harvard Medical School, research shows there is a strong connection between time spent in nature and a reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression.¹

They go on to specify that “calming nature sounds and even outdoor silence can lower blood pressure and levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which calms the body’s fight or flight response.”¹



The visual aspects of nature can also have a soothing effect on people, according to Dr. Jason Strauss, director of geriatric psychiatry at Harvard-affiliated Cambridge Health Alliance. Dr. Strauss goes on to say that the type of setting you spend time in is not an important factor – it is more a question of getting away from the high levels of stimulation in urban settings.

What happens if you cannot make it outside? A 2017 report published by Scientific Reports suggests that listening to nature sounds, or even looking at pictures of natural settings, could have a similar beneficial effect on you.¹ So if you can’t get outside to enjoy the outdoors, try listening to recordings of birds singing or brooks babbling to calm your own mind.

While out on your walk, try to spot:

- ✿ A kind of tree/leaf you haven’t seen before
- ✿ A brightly coloured butterfly
- ✿ A bird with a beautiful song
- ✿ An interesting bug
- ✿ A nicely shaped stone
- ✿ A cloud that has a special shape
- ✿ A sweet-smelling flower

1. Sour mood getting you down? Get back to nature. Harvard Health Publishing. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/sour-mood-getting-you-down-get-back-to-nature>. Accessed: April 24, 2020.



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