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Living and Learning in a Lockdown: 5 Ways to Stay Productive and Entertained at Home

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By [Ishan Singh](#)

If nothing else, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught me that staying at home is tougher than it seems. For introverts like myself, hunkering indoors should come naturally—even pre-coronavirus, I didn't get out a whole lot. Yet the experience has turned out to be very different when hanging out at home becomes less of a pastime and more of national responsibility.

To beat feelings of boredom, isolation and negativity, here are my five suggested ways to stay meaningfully occupied.

#1. Read

Reading has not only helped lower my stress levels and improve my concentration, it has also turned me into an armchair traveller. I was once the proud owner of a collection of books with perfectly uncreased spines, but COVID-19 has turned these once-dusty volumes into my passports to exciting new worlds.

E-books are another great option, especially with bookshops and libraries closed. The Internet has some great resources, such as Project Gutenberg, which has a catalogue of over 60,000 digital books to choose from. If you prefer your books read out to you, there's LibriVox, with a selection of free audiobooks.

My favourite book of the moment is *Normal People* by Sally Rooney. This story follows the lives of two teenagers and the complexities of their relationship as they grow older. In terms of non-fiction, I can't recommend *Steal Like an Artist* by Austin Kleon enough, especially if you're looking to get more artistic and creative in your daily life. I've read it over a dozen times, and still keep finding fresh insights.

#2. Rekindle old friendships

Remember all those people you've been meaning to catch up with? The mutual friends who keep popping up on your Instagram "Explore" page? The Telegram chats which haven't seen a new message in a year? With your old

mates in the same boat (bored at home), chances are, they'd be more than happy to text the night away with you.

Commiserating with friends during a difficult period is a natural stress-buster. Whereas in pre-COVID times it might've come off weird to reconnect with a long-lost buddy "out of the blue", now's never been an easier time to restart an old conversation.

"Isn't being stuck at home the worst?" is my suggestion for a foolproof opening text, followed by a casual segue into "How've you been?" territory. Try it. There's a very high chance you'll be met with a positive response. If you're lucky, this will be followed by an extended catch-up session and a renewed friendship that, I hope, will last beyond the circuit breaker.

#3. Spice up your routine

Whether you're a student or working professional, we all have our set daily routines. Waking up, getting coffee, taking the train—all of that becomes muscle memory after awhile. In fact—and I'm guilty of this—some days we can't even recall what we did that same morning because our brains are on autopilot the whole time. For many people, the global pandemic has affected their sense of normalcy because it has so abruptly disrupted their familiar habits and regimens. I feel the same. However, weeks into a national lockdown, I also see the situation as a unique opportunity to rethink our *modus operandi*.

Personally, I wouldn't just sit around waiting for the world to "open up" again or for "things to go back to what they were". Instead, I've been waking up every day asking myself how I can tweak my routine to serve me better.

So I no longer commute to and from school for lessons. What do I do with that extra time? Maybe a longer workout session is in order. Am I feeling anxious or worried? Perhaps it's time to power up that meditation app I downloaded a week ago. In the evenings, I reflect on the day by playing its events back in my head like a movie, considering what worked for me and what didn't, and how I can switch things up for better results. Some recent changes I've made to my routine include taking cold showers in the morning and meditating before I sleep at night. These small tweaks have made a tremendous difference in my mood and productivity.

#4. Pick up a hobby

Now is *not* as good a time as any to pick up a new skill or nurture a long-held interest. Now is the *best* time for that. Social obligations, much as we miss them, came with their downsides: I can name numerous instances in which

I'd wanted to stay in for the weekend to do my own thing, but because my friends were going out, I felt the pressure to hang out, too.

Well, now that nobody's meeting up except occasionally on Zoom, I have all the time in the world to catch up on stuff I'd always wanted to get into. Like brushing up on my video-editing skills with the help of YouTube tutorials and learning French on Duolingo.

Whatever your interest, the sky's the limit. There are coding courses, Photoshop tutorials, advanced Physics seminars, creative writing masterclasses, the list goes on. These are readily available online, and many of them are free.

#5. Learn a new recipe (or two)

Food delivery services may be fast and convenient, but they can quickly burn a hole in your pocket. I've certainly learned this the hard way. This led me to think: if I find online cooking videos satisfying to watch, why have I never tried them out? I have yet to put the 10-second recipe gifs from Facebook to the test, but I plan to break out my frying pan and learn to make some new dishes. Besides, I find that food tastes extra special when you've made it yourself.

To mitigate the dread of doing the dishes and cleaning up, I recommend one-pot recipes. You can also cut back on meal prep by using recipes requiring only very few ingredients. These days, I've been making spicy beef tacos, adapted from this recipe: I just add cheese, onions and ready-made salsa to the beef.