

I survived solitary confinement. You can survive self-isolating.

Imprisoned in Iran, Jason Rezaian had to cope with panic and anxiety. In this video, he shares how these lessons apply to the fear of coronavirus today.

By [Jason Rezaian](#)

Over the past several days, as many people began confronting the reality that they'd have to stay holed up at home for the foreseeable future, friends around the world reached out to me for advice. They wanted tips on how to deal with [prolonged social isolation](#).

Suddenly my own [experience](#) of being held for 544 days, including in solitary confinement, in Iran's Evin Prison has become more relevant than I ever imagined possible.

While the self-imposed isolation we're going through is vastly different from the harsh conditions of prison, prolonged captivity did teach me a few useful lessons about how to make the best of it. So here are a few pieces of advice:

1. Don't spend *all* your time online.

You thought you spent a lot of time on the Internet before? That was nothing. And if you're active on social media, as many of us are, it's going to be hard to step off that merry-go-round.

Let's not fool ourselves: We aren't going to completely unplug. But I strongly suggest spending as much time away from the Internet and television as possible, especially when you're not working.

During the [544 days I spent in prison](#), I never had a chance to go online, not even for a moment. Throughout my long ordeal, the inability to access information felt like the greatest deprivation of all.

In retrospect, though, it wasn't all bad. For the first time in my adult life, I felt as though I was really able to focus on a single task for an extended period of time.

Put your phone down, close the laptop and turn your attention to activities that don't

require a screen — such as spending time with your loved ones.

2. Read books

After I was released from solitary confinement after 49 days, I was allowed some small privileges. The one that I quickly realized was the most indispensable was access to books. Reading was a wonderful mental escape from my grim surroundings. It also connected me to the outside world.

I found myself gravitating toward books about hardship. They demonstrated for me that my experience, no matter how difficult, was one that I could survive.

If you want to read about surviving really tough times while maintaining a sense of perspective and wit, there's no book better than [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago,"](#) his own memoir of imprisonment in Soviet prison camps. I read it while in Tehran's Evin Prison. Suddenly I didn't feel so sorry for myself. Understanding that my own predicament was just a tiny blip on the continuum of injustice turned out to be surprisingly soothing.

3. Exercise

You might not think it's possible because you don't have a Peloton at home.

No matter how small your living space is, though, you probably have enough room to walk. If possible, take the stairs. That's what I'm doing. All three flights of them, many times a day.

Early in my imprisonment, an urge to move kicked in. So I walked. Sometimes for hours on end each day, even when I was held in solitary confinement in a cell that was only about eight and a half feet in length. Staying in motion is one of the best things we can do for our mental health.

4. Plan for the future

There were many days in prison that I thought it would never end. You may feel something similar in the weeks ahead, or you might have that feeling already. But this will pass. Maybe it won't happen as quickly and as smoothly as President Trump [likes to insist](#) — but relatively soon we'll be able to return to our normal routines.

Think about what you want that to look like — where you'll go and who you want to be with. In uncertain times like these, few things are more comforting than thinking about

better times. I suggest focusing on the ones to come rather than the ones you've already lived.

5. Laugh

My last (but by far most important) piece of advice is to find as much as you can to laugh about each day. I promise you there are opportunities all around you. If I could find them in solitary confinement, you can find them in your living room.

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