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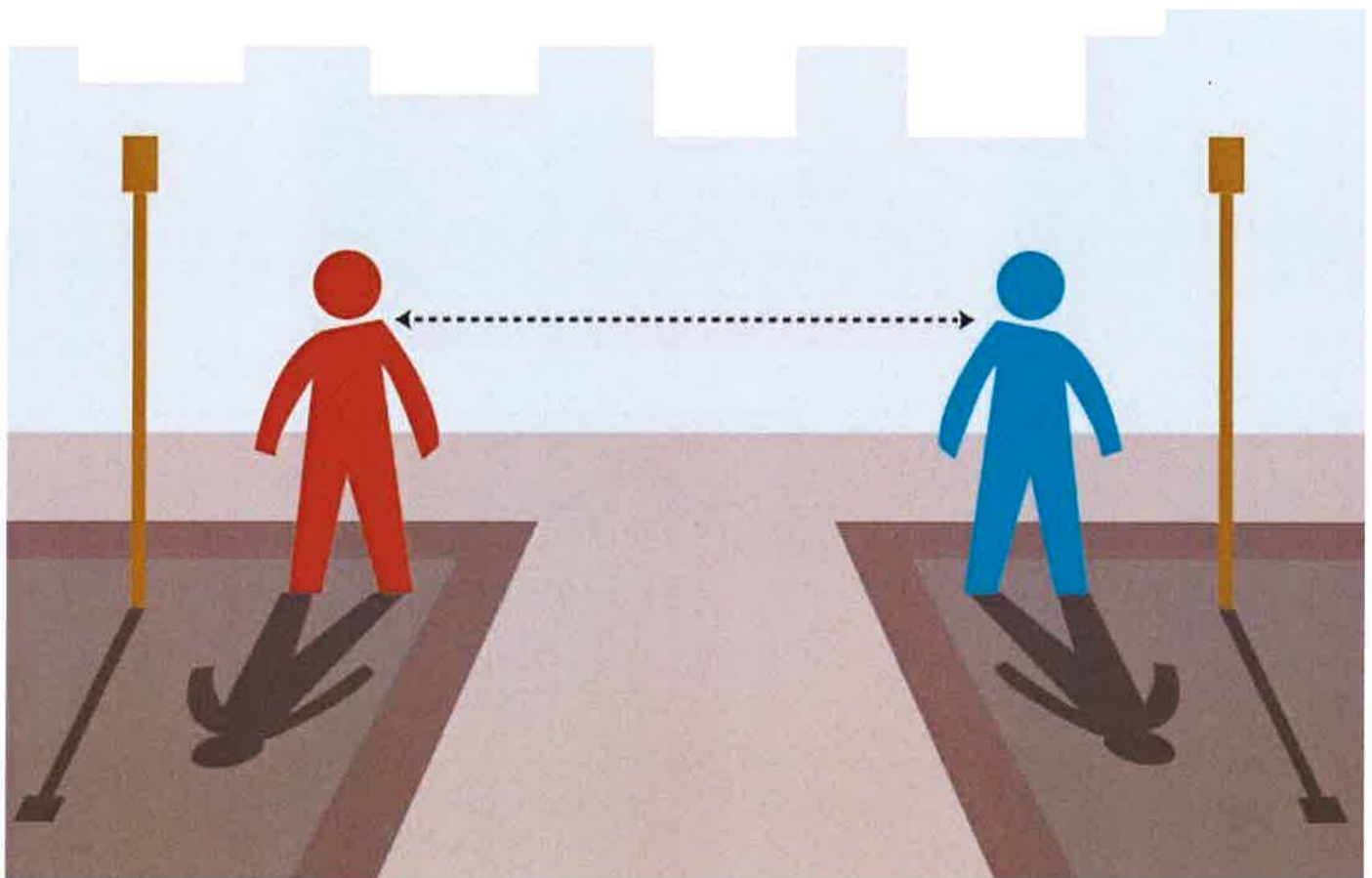

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COVID-19 pandemic: Tips to remain 'sane and safe' during social distancing

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Muncie, IN — Maintaining a routine, helping others and taking time to focus on self-care are among the tips one Ball State University professor is sharing to help people stay "sane and safe" while practicing social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jagdish Khubchandani, a health sciences professor, has 15 recommendations to "counterbalance" the physical and psychological effects of social distancing, which involves reducing close contact with others in an effort to help stop the spread of the disease, per guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Khubchandani's tips:

- Maintain a routine. As much as possible, social distancing should not disrupt your sleep-wake cycle, working hours and daily activities.
- Make social distancing a positive by taking time to focus on your personal health, training, diet, physical activity levels and health habits, as well as reassessing your work.
- Cook for yourself and others in need. Add more fruits, vegetables, vitamins and proteins to your diet. (Most U.S. adults don't consume enough fruits and vegetables). Eat two or three meals a day.
- Go for a walk or exercise at home. "Definitely go out in nature as much as possible. Only half of American adults today get enough exercise."
- Don't let anxiety or being at home lead to binge eating or alcohol and drug use. Don't oversleep, but try to sleep at least seven hours a day.
- Know that social distancing can cause anxiety and depression because of disruption to routines, isolation and fear over a pandemic. If you or someone you know is experiencing either, help is available.
- Make the best use of technology to finish your work, attend meetings and engage with co-workers with the same frequency required during active office hours. "The good news: Working from home can make people more productive and happier."
- Small breaks during social distancing are also good times to reassess your skills and training – consider taking an online course, pursuing certification, undergoing training or personality development, or learning a new language.
- Engage in spring cleaning, clear clutter and donate household items. Home clutter can harbor pollutants, lead to infections and result in unhygienic spaces.
- Social distancing shouldn't translate to an unhealthy life on social media. Although you can certainly become a victim of myths, misinformation, anxiety and fearmongering, you can also inadvertently become a perpetrator, creating more trouble for communities.
- Based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey and leisure-related time-spending patterns worldwide, "too much time" is spent on screens. Except for one to two times a day to watch, read or listen to national news for general consumption and local news for updates on the spread of COVID-19 in your community, you're likely overconsuming information and taking away time for yourself and from friends and family.
- Reach out to others and offer help. Social distancing should help reinvest in and recreate social bonds. Consider providing for and helping those at risk or marginalized (e.g., the elderly, disabled and homeless; survivors of natural disasters; and people living in shelters). "You will certainly find someone in the neighborhood who needs some help." This can be done from a distance via a phone or by online activities, as well as giving.
- Check your list of contacts on email and your phone. It may be a good time to check on your friends' and family members' well-being. This will also help you feel more connected, social, healthier and engaged. "Be kind to all; you never know who is struggling and how you can make a difference."
- Engage in alternative activities to keep your mind and body active. For example, listen to music or sing; try dancing or biking, yoga or meditation; take virtual tours of museums and places of interest; sketch or paint; read books or novels; solve puzzles or play board games; try new recipes; and learn about other cultures.
- Don't isolate yourself completely – social distancing shouldn't become social isolation. Don't be afraid, don't panic and do keep communicating with others.

"Social distancing can be tough on people and disrupt the social and economic fibers of our society," Khubchandani said. "Given the existing crisis of isolation in societies — with probably the loneliest young generation that we have today — social distancing can also take a personal health toll on people, causing psychological problems, among many others."