

Now What? I'm BORED!

Isolation and quarantine can be a bore

Let's get one thing straight; boredom does not have anything to do with not having anything to do. A person can be bored *and* busy. Boredom, especially in light of a busy schedule, can be both debilitating and demoralizing. This was studied at length during a series of NASA-funded experiments collectively referred to as HI-SEAS (the Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation). During these studies, crews lived in a simulated Mars habitat atop the desolated, Mars-like environment of the Mauna Loa volcano in Hawaii. Subjects were isolated from family and friends (and all other humans), for periods ranging from 4 months to a year. *

The research objective is determining what it takes to keep a space flight crew happy and healthy during the isolation and boredom that inevitably accompany extended missions. Crew writer and second in command on the first HI-SEAS mission, Kate Green, writes about the experience in her Slate.com article [Living Life at a Distance](#). As she puts it, "isolation comes with significant psychosocial challenges ... for astronauts on a long-duration mission. NASA wants to understand what they're up against and how to help them cope." **

The crew followed prescribed daily routines that included simulated duties, experiments and other related activities. Even though they had things to do, Green reports among the challenges she and her crew experienced, "boredom's a big one."

Obviously, the isolation we're experiencing today is considerably less dramatic and all-encompassing than that of a trip to Mars. But there are certain parallels. Green tells us, "I believe that some of the approaches my crew and I took while isolated in that dome can apply to the current [COVID-19] situation." Here are three of the insights she offers to ward off boredom, maintain sanity and pass the time:

- **Make Rituals:** Twice every week, Green and her crew met for movie nights. "Sometimes it felt like a drag," she says. And she didn't always share the same enthusiasm for some of her crewmates' movie choices. But it was good to have something to look forward to, a consistent event to mark the time. As she describes it, "time is slippery in isolation. The more you can fix it, the better."
- **Journal:** Journaling was an important part of documenting the HI-SEAS experiment. But as many of us earthlings already know, "offloading stressful ruminations to the page can be a great relief." During this historic time, "you likely won't regret keeping some kind of record—words, pictures, videos—of your day-to-day life," she says.
- **Remember your Purpose:** That might be easier when you're working for NASA on a project to help inform future space travel. But we all have a mission now as well. The quarantine does have purpose, and it's proving effective. Green describes this eloquently by pointing out that our mission today is "to help keep a deadly virus from more seriously ravaging those in my community and beyond." That feels like a fitting way to make sense of this quarantine.

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Want to read more?

* <https://hi-seas.org>

** <https://slate.com/technology/2020/03/nasa-hi-seas-space-travel-coronavirus-isolation.html>