

It's reading time!

This period of quarantine and lockdown has definitely redefined and reshaped our lives. While each individual is praying and hoping for all of this to be over, this stay-at-home period has given us all a different perspective of our own selves. We are getting more individual space and 'me-time,' and many of us are utilising this by trying out new things or just pursuing an old hobby — cooking, painting, yoga, meditation, or reading. Sticking to the idea of reading, if you are not sure which book to read or looking for recommendations, here is a list that you should definitely try out.

Romance

Every Breath, The Notebook (Nicholas Sparks); *It Ends with Us* (Colleen Hoover); *Beautiful Disaster* (Jamie McGuire); *Gone with the Wind* (Margaret Mitchell); *A Long Petal of the Sea* (Isabel Allende); *The Proposal, The Wedding Date* (Jasmine Guillory); *Call Me by Your Name* (Andre Aciman); *Eleanor and Park* (Rainbow Rowell); *The Hating Game* (Sally Thorne).

Thriller and Crime Fiction

Are you Afraid of the Dark, The Silent Widow, After the Darkness (Sidney Sheldon); *The Da Vinci Code, Angels and Demons, Inferno* (Dan Brown); *Dead Letters* (Catie Dolan-Leach); *Gone Girl* (Gilliam Flynn); *The Widow* (Fiona Barton); *Strangers* (Dean Koontz); *The Girl on the Train* (Paula Hawkins); *The Annotated Big Sleep* (Raymond Chandler); *The Silent Patient* (Alex Michaelides); *The Long Call* (Ann Cleeves); *Black 13* (Adam Hamdy); *Girl in Room 105* (Chetan Bhagat).

Horror and Supernatural Fiction

Carrie, The Shining, The Outsider, The Institute

(Stephen King); *At the Mountains of Madness, The Call of Cthulhu* (H.P. Lovecraft); *The Hunger* (Alma Katsu); *The Haunting of Hill House* (Shirley Jackson); *Beloved* (Toni Morrison); *Bird Box* (Josh Malerman); *Come Closer* (Sara Gran); *The Drowning Girl* (Caitlin R. Kiernan); *The Fifth Child* (Doris Lessing); *The Invited* (Jennifer McMahon); *Moon Called* (Patricia Briggs).

Science Fiction

Neuromancer (William Gibson); *Hyperion* (Dan Simmons); *Metro 2033* (Dmitry Glukhovsky); *The Martian* (Andy Weir); *Borne* (Jeff VanderMeer); *The Time Machine* (H. G. Wells); *Ender's Game* (Orson Scott Card); *Dune* (Frank Herbert); *The Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood); *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury); *Ancestral Night* (Elizabeth Bear); *Children of Time, Children of Ruin* (Adrian Tchaikovsky).

Youth and Young Adult novels

Fault in our Stars, Paper Towns (John Green); *Perks of being a Wallflower* (Stephen Chbosky); *The Outsiders* (S.E. Hinton); *The Book Thief* (Markus Zusak); *All the Bright Places* (Jennifer

Niven); *The Truth about Forever* (Sarah Dessen); *A Separate Peace* (John Knowles); *Five Point Someone, Half Girlfriend* (Chetan Bhagat); *Two can keep a Secret* (Karen M. McManus).

Spiritual books

Like the Flowing River, Manuscript found in Accra, The Witch of Portobello (Paulo Coelho); *The Power of Now, A New Earth* (Eckhart Tolle); *The Untethered Soul* (Michael A. Singer); *The Secret* (Rhonda Byrne); *The Celestial Prophecy* (James Redfield); *A Return to Love* (Marianne Williamson); *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* (Dan Millman); *The Book of Awakening* (Mark Nepo).

Travel books

The Alchemist (Paulo Coelho); *The Great Railway Bazaar, Dark Star Safari* (Paul Theroux); *Round the World in 80 Days* (Jules Verne); *Down Under* (Bill Bryson); *In Patagonia* (Bruce Chatwin); *A short walk in the Hindu Kush* (Erik Newby); *Eat, Pray, Love* (Elizabeth Gilbert); *Vagabonding* (Rolf Potts); *Blue Highways* (William Least Heat-Moon).

Fantasy

The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings (J.R.R. Tolkien); *Divergent* trilogy (Veronica Roth); *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (C.S. Lewis); *Hunger Games* series (Suzanne Collins); *The Gunslinger* (Stephen King); *Prince of Thorns* (Mark Lawrence); *A Wizard of Earthsea* (Ursula K. Le Guin); *Assassin's Apprentice* (Robin Hobb); *The Magicians* (Lev Grossman); *Children of Blood and Bone, Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (Tomi Adeyemi).

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By Faiza Khondokar

READER'S CHIT

Mindfulness and the quarantine

On the morning of 12 March, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and the world as we knew it came to a standstill. We, along with the rest of the world, are now passing our days in home-quarantine and dealing with numerous uncertainties. Never has it been more important for all of us to come together and promote survival as well as the well-being of ourselves and others.

In addition to protecting our physical health from the COVID-19, we must be conscious of how to maintain our mental wellness. As fear, confinement, and uncertainty test us, practicing mindfulness can provide us some much-needed emotional nutrition.

None of us were prepared to face this type of unexpected situation, and long before the pandemic, we already had a very complex mental situation (depression, phobias, generalised anxiety, eating disorders etc.). This isolation/self-quarantine can work as a catalyst to increase these mental health issues. Practicing mindfulness can work like a wonder to keep up a positive mental state during the crisis that we are facing. The concept of mindfulness is not very complicated, and it is simply the awareness of the present moment that one is in.

Mindfulness includes consciousness and an open as well as an accepting attitude. The practice of mindfulness allows one to

notice emotions, anxieties, and negative perceptions as they arise and aids one to accept whatever arises rather than to suppress it or make a big deal out of it. According to an Associate Professor of Family Medicine, Dalhousie University, Canada, "Emotions are like waves; they come on and if we allow them, they pass." Therefore, knowing how to regulate our emotions can help us sustain our mental wellness.

Mindfulness is best conducted through guided meditation and body scan. It is basically taking a pause for a moment and observing your body, thoughts, and feelings. One merely needs to set aside some time, observe the present moment, let the judgments roll by, and return to observing the present moment.

Moreover, the practice of mindfulness is highly recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) to the people who experience recurrent

depression. Both adults as well as children can practice mindfulness at their convenience and there are tonnes of helpful tech tools to support the practice of mindfulness.

We all are passing a very challenging situation, in which, nothing is certain and it is okay to be fearful. In order to make life easier and cope with the uncertainties we are facing, we all need each other's support and compassion.

Practicing mindfulness regularly not only helps us to be kind towards ourselves, but also to the people around us. According to the research conducted by the mental health foundation of the UK shows that "People undertaking mindfulness training have shown increased activity in the area of the brain associated with positive emotion — the pre-frontal cortex — which is generally less active in people who are depressed." In short, positive emotions such as empathy and kindness are cultivated through mindfulness, which is urgently needed in

this complex situation we are currently encountering.

Passing the time in insolation is extremely difficult for people with a pre-existing mental health conditions as well as for the underprivileged people who cannot afford to stay at home. The fear that stems from the coronavirus threat is not possible to eliminate, but we can rationalise this emotion and prevent it from having disastrous consequences. Exercising psychological strategies such as mindfulness can help us to a great extent in order to handle this quarantine calmly and support each other.

Practicing the art of living a mindful life encourages us to adopt healthy behaviour patterns and attitudes, which will eventually help us face this crisis collectively and more assertively. It is high time we learn to reflect on our inner thoughts and emotions and learn to regulate them adequately.

By Ayman Anika