

## About the Swedish Red Cross

For many years, volunteers of the Swedish Red Cross have visited detainees in both remand prisons and prisons, in accordance with an agreement with the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. These activities are carried out by volunteer visitors, and participation is also voluntary. The purpose is to help alleviate the isolation of being in custody.

The visitors to the remand centre are ordinary fellow human beings who want to do something to help another fellow human being. They mainly visit detainees who have restrictions. Before a volunteer starts working as a remand prison visitor, he or she receives training for the assignment and signs a confidentiality agreement. If you have access to the internet, you can read more about us on our website, [www.rodakorset.se](http://www.rodakorset.se)

This booklet has been prepared by the **Scandinavian Solitary Confinement Network** and translated and adapted to Swedish conditions by the Swedish Red Cross.

**The Scandinavian Solitary Confinement Network** brings together professionals, volunteers and organisations in the Scandinavian countries. Our goal is to increase knowledge about how solitary confinement affects people. We are critical of the fact that solitary confinement is used extensively in Scandinavian remand prisons and prisons. Through this brochure, we hope to limit the harm often caused by solitary confinement. If you have access to the internet, you can read more about us on our website, [www.isolation.network](http://www.isolation.network)

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FORM: HELENE HEED. MARS 2022

# When you are locked in a cell for 22 hours a day or more

## IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT



## Stress

Being in solitary confinement is hard. Most people react negatively to being in custody. You do not have much contact with other people. You do not have many opportunities to influence what happens to you and your surroundings. Maybe you are worried about your family and miss them.

When you are in solitary confinement, it is common to feel stressed. Both your body and your emotions react to the solitary confinement.

In this brochure, you will learn how to relax and sleep better. We also offer advice on how you can get through your days in solitary confinement more easily.

We also offer advice on how

to adjust more easily to life after solitary confinement, when you have more contact with other people again. Many people react even more strongly then.

There are many common stress reactions to solitary confinement. Some people do not experience any stress reactions at all, others have only a few, while some people suffer in many different ways.

### Is it difficult to read or understand what we write?

Ask someone who can go through the content with you. This might be a member of the remand prison staff, a priest/imam who visits the remand prison, a member of the healthcare staff, or a volunteer.

## You are experiencing a stress reaction if you

- have a hard time concentrating
- forget things more easily
- get tired
- have trouble sleeping
- have stomach aches
- get in a bad mood
- get angry and irritated more easily
- have headaches
- have stiff or sore muscles
- eat too little, or lose your appetite
- are worried
- feel sad
- cry more often than usual
- feel that you are losing yourself, become afraid you're "going crazy"
- experience feelings of anxiety or panic
- have a hard time being around other people
- notice that mental problems that troubled you in the past are now coming back

## In this brochure, we describe what you can do to feel better

- relax
- stick to routines and be active
- create variety during your day
- accept the offers you receive
- exercise a little in your living space and go outside to the exercise yard
- try to get a good night's sleep
- don't worry unnecessarily
- talk to someone
- write letters if you can
- write reminder notes
- keep in touch with family and friends if you can
- take your mental reactions seriously
- talk to a member of the healthcare staff, a psychologist, a priest, or someone else
- seek help if you are thinking of harming yourself or taking your own life





## Stress is something you can influence

You can usually avoid situations that make you stressed. But when you are in custody, you cannot choose to leave the situation. That is why it is important to think about how you can take care of yourself. We have 11 suggestions and tips for you.

A member of the healthcare staff can help you if you have health problems. There is also a lot you can do yourself. You are the expert on how you feel.

### 1. RELAX

When you are in solitary confinement, it can be difficult to relax. Maybe you feel anxious and restless. You can't do the things you would normally do to unwind.

**TIP:** Try to relax, even if it's difficult. It's important for your body that you keep your emotions calm. Find new ways to relax. For example, you can do breathing exercises or listen to calm music.

Managing to relax is not always easy. You may need to practise for a long time before you succeed, especially when you are in a new environment or situation. If you can't relax, talk to the remand prison staff, the healthcare staff, or a priest/imam who can give you advice. Make a list of things that can usually help you relax. Try to do what you can.

### BREATHING EXERCISE:

Sit or stand in a comfortable position and place one hand on your stomach. Count to 7 as you breathe in. Count to 11 as you breathe out. The point of the exercise is that you spend more time breathing in than breathing out. Do the exercise for a few minutes until you feel calmer. You can also look at the picture of the tree. Now let your eyes follow each side of the picture as you count to four. Breathe out along the first edge. On the next edge, hold your breath. On the third edge, slowly breathe in. On the fourth edge, hold your breath. Now you're back where you started. Repeat the exercise until your body feels relaxed.

### 2. STICK TO ROUTINES AND BE ACTIVE

Try to stick to your normal, healthy routines. Get up at the same time every day, shower, brush your teeth, eat healthy food at regular times and keep your living space clean. Fill the day with as many chores and projects as possible. Participate in activities you would not normally take part in. Spend time on small, everyday tasks. When you are locked up, staying active is good for both your body and your mind.

Tell the librarian what you like to read and ask for tips. If you have trouble concentrating, it may be hard to read and remember what you have read. Don't let that stop you from reading. If you can read a couple of pages at a time, do that and then stop when you can't keep going. Don't set higher goals for yourself than you know you can achieve. Even if you don't have as much energy as usual, you can still do something.

### 3. CREATE VARIETY DURING YOUR DAY

When you are imprisoned and in solitary confinement, it can seem difficult to create variety in everyday life. Be creative and invent things to do. Change where you sit. For example, you can switch between sitting in bed and on the chair at certain times. Set aside time for things you enjoy doing, such as reading books, writing letters, or keeping a diary. It's a good idea to decide a specific time each day when you do different things. Try to move as much as possible, so that you stimulate your brain, muscles and blood circulation.





#### **4. ACCEPT THE OFFERS YOU RECEIVE**

Take advantage of the opportunities that exist. Maybe you think what is offered seems boring. Maybe you are not interested in the activities that are available. But when you are in custody, it is important for your health that you stay active.

Take the opportunity to exercise, go outside to the exercise yard, and participate in the activities that are offered. Ask the staff what opportunities there are in your unit. When you are in prison, and especially when you are in solitary confinement, it is important for your health that you try to stay active.

#### **5. EXERCISE IN YOUR LIVING SPACE AND GO OUTSIDE TO THE EXERCISE YARD**

Exercise in your living space every day. For example, you can do sit-ups, push-ups, back exercises, breathing exercises, planks, yoga or meditation. Try to keep your body moving.

Take the opportunity to go outside every day. It helps keep your body going. At the same time, fresh air and daylight are important for both your health and your mood, even when the weather is bad. Being outdoors counteracts depression.





## **6. TRY TO GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP**

Only lie down in your bed when it's time to go to sleep. If you spend much of the day lying in bed, then when you go to bed at night your body does not receive a signal that it is time to sleep. So avoid lying in bed unnecessarily, for example when watching TV. Sit on a chair instead. Avoid watching TV shows that make you tense or excited before going to bed. This creates tension in the body that makes it more difficult to fall asleep.

Create a routine that you stick to every time you go to bed. A regular routine could be: brushing your teeth, turning off the TV, reading a newspaper and turning off the light. Choose a routine that works for you. The purpose of the routine is to help you unwind and calm down. Try not to drink coffee, tea and cola after six in the evening. Coffee, tea and cola contain caffeine. Caffeine keeps you awake. Being locked up can make you more easily agitated. Even if you have not had trouble sleeping in the past, the stress of being in custody can mean that even small amounts of caffeine make it difficult to sleep.

## **7. DON'T WORRY UNNECESSARILY**

If you have a lot to think about, you can try writing down your worries on a piece of paper and then see if there is anything you can do about

them. If you can, do something about the things that worry you. If you can't do anything about something that is worrying you, try not to think about it. When you worry about something you can't do anything about, the stress in your body increases.

Many people find it helpful to talk to someone about the worries they can't do anything about. Maybe someone can help you reduce your anxiety.

## **8. TALK TO SOMEONE**

Most people have a need to talk to other people. In a remand prison, social opportunities are limited, especially if you are in solitary confinement. Use the opportunities you get.

If you trust someone you are in contact with, you might talk to him or her. This might be someone from the remand prison staff, a priest/imam, a volunteer, or a member of the healthcare staff. Talk to them about what you need and ask for advice.

You can also talk to your legal representative by phone.

## **9. WRITE LETTERS IF YOU CAN**

For many people, writing helps. Write to someone outside the remand prison, or write to yourself. Many people find that writing about things reduces their anxiety. If you have writing difficulties, you can ask for help.



## **10. WRITE REMINDER NOTES**

Stress can make your memory worse than usual. If you find that you are forgetting more things than usual, it may be a good idea to write reminder notes for yourself. Before meeting with your legal representative, write a list of questions so that you don't forget to ask what you are wondering about. Write down what you have agreed with your legal representative or with others.

## **11. KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

Many people miss their family and friends when they are in custody. Life on the outside continues without you. It can be painful to think about the fact that your family and friends are continuing to live their normal lives without you. Maybe you are worried about them. If you can, try to stay in touch by calling and writing letters. When you are allowed to have visitors, see them. It's important to keep in touch with family and friends during your time in custody.



## **If you suffer from any form of mental illness, tell someone**

Mental illnesses can flare up and worsen when you are in custody. If you have a psychiatric diagnosis or have symptoms that worry you, it is important that you notify the healthcare staff at the remand prison as soon as possible.

Many inmates experience that they lose control of their own lives when they are isolated from society. Losing control can be unsettling. If you are afraid of becoming ill or psychotic, tell someone. You can talk to the healthcare staff, a priest/imam, or another member of the staff. They know that the situation

you are in can be difficult and can give you advice and support during this difficult time.

## **Take your mental reactions seriously**

Now we have given you 11 tips for how you can feel better during the time you are in solitary confinement. Even if you do your best to handle the solitary confinement, it can still be difficult. So we want to say something about what you can do if the solitary confinement becomes particularly hard to bear. We also offer some advice on how you can seek help and what reactions you may have after the solitary confinement is over.

## **Seek help for suicidal thoughts and self-harm**

If you are considering taking your own life or harming yourself, it is important that you say something so that you can have someone to talk to. The healthcare staff, the priest/imam or a member of the remand prison staff can talk to you and help you overcome these difficult thoughts. Talking to someone who listens and understands can be helpful during a difficult time.

## **You can ask for help to appeal**

You have the right to appeal decisions on restrictions. Ask your legal representative for help.



## **From solitary confinement to community**

Most people long to get out of solitary confinement, but the transition from solitary confinement to community can still feel tough. You get back something you have been missing, such as someone to talk to or do things with. If you have been in solitary confinement for a long time, it can feel difficult to be around other people. Don't pull away. When you are invited to participate in something, say yes. You will slowly get used to being around other people again.

People in solitary confinement have very little physical contact with others. A long time can pass between each hug or pat on the shoulder. For some people, it may therefore feel strange or uncomfortable to receive friendly and tender forms of touch after spending time in solitary confinement, both while they are still in prison and once they have been released. It is perfectly normal to react differently to touch after being inside.