

## Being 'the sick one' during a pandemic

I have ordered this list by the time when I first experienced these things during the COVID pandemic.

It would be unjust not to recognise that I am one of what I call 'the lucky sick' - I am now in a place with my health where I can 'pass for normal' in my day-to-day life: with some adjustments (and a fair number of sick days) I work a full-time job, have a part-time small business, manage a household, can exercise, and, with help, have two wonderful and demanding pets. For many people with chronic illnesses and disabilities this time has been one of job loss and 'house arrest', often not within a happy home, and that is something that is important to recognise. This account does not encompass all the shared experiences of the COVID pandemic, but shows what 'the edge of disability' has been like during this time. When the world sees you as something you are not, you can often see how they truly feel about the 'vulnerable'.

- Being seen as overly worried when the waves of news first broke, warning of dark days ahead.
- Being the only one to work from home when the first COVID cases were reported in your country, even though HR urged everyone to do so.
- Being kept off the government's vulnerable list, because your lack of diagnosis means you can't get help - you're *the wrong type of sick*.
- Being the only one in the office to initially be locked down at home, for three (3) months, with little warning.
- Being seen as paranoid about your medication supply being affected, even though it's the one thing keeping you from unemployment and losing the way of life and level of health you've spent years of impossibly hard mental and physical work to achieve.
- Being part of the social wave, keeping so busy with crafts and baking that you don't have time to worry so much about the pandemic.
- Being too tired of the same old argument to face yet another conversation about how (wrongly) "it's only as bad as the flu" - a disease that kills many people every year, but is 'only a cold' to the healthy.
- Being kept from tending to your sick pet as the stables suddenly call you with worse and worse news of its own disease outbreak.
- Being able to go out for the worst reason: to possibly say goodbye to your best friend, and feeling guilty for enjoying the view on the drive for a few seconds.
- Being weirdly relieved at staying inside, because if you're here then the worst has not happened to your pet.
- Being stuck on your mattress-sized balcony, your only chance to be outside for months, watching your neighbours head out into the world, treating the crisis like a free holiday.
- Being worried as your friends and family, some 'vulnerable' themselves, put themselves at risk by not following guidance.
- Being equal parts amazed, annoyed and alarmed when you hear your neighbours all develop a terrible cough, and not quarantining, but instead 'disinfecting their car' with wood polish.

- Being the only one in your immediate circle with an education in infectious diseases, and so who has to smile in denial when they hear talk of 'back to normal soon'.
- Being allowed out once a day for a walk, only to wonder if it's really worth it when your quiet neighborhood becomes packed with people who won't distance, won't wear masks, and have large street parties to 'defy the virus with community spirit'.
- Being sad more and more, as the lack of contact with family and friends wears on you, despite the fact that you live so far from them that you're often isolated anyway.
- Being the only one you see outside wearing a mask, even as the tide turns from WHO recommendation to government enforcement.
- Being frustrated at having to hold your tongue at work when your colleagues gossip about breaking the rules for frivolous reasons, and then having to feint surprise when they test positive shortly after.
- Being able to pick up your new rescue cat and complete your home, because the shelter made it safe to do so.
- Being allowed to travel for exercise again and rushing over to the stables that first day to spend your allotted one (1) hour slot back doing what makes you happiest.
- Being able, with a lot of planning, to achieve one of your dreams in spite of the COVID pandemic and a bad health flare-up.
- Being able to achieve another, bigger dream the next day, against even greater COVID and chronic illness odds.
- Being able to escape for a trip home, to eat from their supermarkets and stare at their living room for a while instead of your own, while others track the virus back from Europe because they can't possibly survive a summer without a trip on a plane and a week of restaurant dining.
- Being a little bit angry all the time, from constant injustice and inequality, the thoughtlessness of others, and the lack of your usual pick-me-up experiences and connections.
- Being trapped in a difficult home, where there's no social escape from the one other person you live with, and so feeling lonely in spite of never being alone.
- Being panicked when your Track and Trace app pings a positive, only to find out it was a bug.
- Being made to decide whether an essential flu jab is really worth it, when for the second time you walk to your pharmacy, in the pouring rain (taking the long route where you have the only chance of staying two (2) metres away from the public who refuse to keep their distance), only to be told your appointment was cancelled without you being told.
- Being stared at in British shock for calling out people in a shop who flout the clear signage to keep apart; who instead think it's fine to come into contact with you so that they can get to some paint tins faster.
- Being unsurprised when, after all this, case numbers skyrocket and people turn on their civic leaders and scientific experts, rather than at their own selfish behaviour that has seen almost no-one stick to the medical and policy guidance.
- Being made to feel like your sacrifices were for nothing, as very few others followed the medical guidance and kept safe, increasing the virus' transmission and death toll.