

COVID and Isolation, As Astronauts in Space Confinement

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For the first time in the last 11 years, from the European Space Agency (ESA), a call is made to recruit candidates to be part of a new era of space exploration with the challenge of reaching beyond what has been achieved up to now.

Throughout history, humanity manifests its desire for exploration and knowledge of unknown corners of the universe. Despite this, living conditions in extreme situations are a real challenge and are currently under study. Not only due to physiological changes but also due to the need to adapt psychologically to these new realities.

This need for psychological adaptation, given the emotional isolation and distancing that affects space explorers, is also manifested in those who have remained disconnected from their affections, for a long time, because of the coronavirus.

Affective isolation is a way of coping carried out by the individual, when faced with the perception of an internal or external threat, manifesting itself through a dissociation between the associated ideas and feelings.

Psychological changes during confinement

The globalized quarantine illustrates two fundamental aspects: the separation or physical isolation of our closest ones and the restriction of personal freedom. This period of mandatory confinement is one of the recurring factors that establish a parallel between astronauts and terrestrial citizens.

Space dementia is one of the great risks that an astronaut runs throughout the experience of it. NASA's Human Research Program (HRP-Human Research Program) studies and analyzes factors such as lack of natural light and narrow spaces as they produce greater stress. Even cognitive dysfunction and sleep deprivation; Maladaptive behaviors that are manifested throughout the planet during the pandemic.

Psychosocial health

One of the most significant elements of recent years is ensuring optimal conditions for astronauts to express their emotions and psychological needs, especially in missions with long periods in orbit. In both land and space, exchange and the provision of social support favor a degree of constructive well-being. Giving and receiving support, carrying out activities that involve objectives, responsibilities and collective construction are central to a stable behavior of any human being.

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Virtuality represents a hopeful resource in the construction of a medium, whether in space or on earth. The psychological accompaniment through telepsychology and the transmission of messages from significant others have proven to be a necessary element to face loneliness.

Back to Earth

According to the Nasa report “Review of the NASA Astronaut, Johnson Space Center Astronaut and Flight Surgeon Survey Report”, once the stress factors experienced have been overcome, the alterations in behavior are favorable. Observations show that astronauts develop a greater degree of resilience and deepen their sense of brotherhood as citizens of planet earth.

According to the Berlin psychologist Werner Wolff, Resilience is a story of successful adaptations in the individual who has been exposed to biological risk factors; furthermore, it implies the expectation of continuing with a low susceptibility to future stressors.

Cosmonauts advise those in confinement to look for productive alternatives when faced with an extremely dangerous environment. It is ideal to set a clear goal and objectives, knowing our limitations.

The overwhelmed feeling of being faced with an extreme challenge modifies our existence. Both COVID and an interplanetary mission generate changes in the lives of those who live the experience. We can surely learn from both experiences.

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