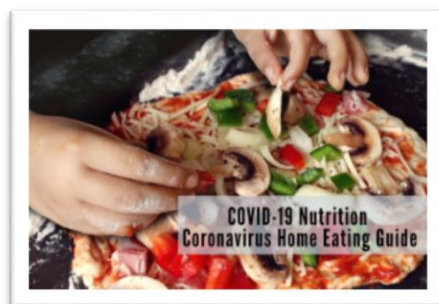


COVID-19 Nutrition: Coronavirus Home Eating Guide

by Andrea Holwegner | Mar 30, 2020



What To Eat When You Are Stuck At Home

Wondering about COVID-19 nutrition? The COVID-19 situation changed everything. Our family life, work life, home schooling situation, social life have all shifted. As employment security, financial situations and small business uncertainty have changed dramatically almost overnight our physical health, including our eating habits and physical activity patterns as well as mental health, are at risk.

While navigating uncertain times is certainly not easy, there are some things we can do to take care of ourselves, families and communities right now. Self-care starts with thinking about our new daily habits at home and what we can do to feed ourselves with healthy choices as best we can.

What changes are people experiencing when it comes to COVID-19 eating and food choices at the grocery store?

As all of us have been to the grocery store we've all seen the empty shelves as people are stocking up on food and in some cases hoarding large amounts of food. While having some extras on hand is good so that you don't have to go to the store as often so we can do our part for public safety with social distancing, it is unnecessary to hoard food.

Buying an excessive amount of food isn't a good idea as it can strain people's finances that are already stretched thin or are uncertain right now. Buying an excessive amount of food can also lead to more food waste and considering approximately **40% of food produced yearly** is wasted we need to be mindful we are not purchasing more than we need. This isn't just fresh foods that have a short shelf life. Packaged foods also have expiry dates you need to be mindful of.

What are some of the COVID-19 nutrition challenges that people are experiencing at home right now?

Here are 7 COVID-19 eating challenges we are seeing with our clients right now:

1. Stress eating and emotional overeating to stuff uncomfortable emotions related to fear, sadness, boredom and anxiety.

2. While anxiety and depression can cause overeating for some people it can also do the opposite for others where food (especially healthy choices) are not appealing and simply not enough food is taken in.
3. A rise in eating disorder behaviors such as restricting, bingeing and purging due to mental health and also reduced access to health care providers that are not working virtually for support.
4. Increased alcohol consumption in an attempt to numb uncomfortable emotions and those with a past history of alcohol or drug addiction are at risk for relapse.
5. Increased cravings for comfort foods (often sweet and savoury foods) as a result of reduced social interaction, isolation for those that live alone and reduced physical activity with gyms being closed.
6. Trends show an increase in baking at home since you've got more time at home, increased cravings for sweets and also this is an activity parents and caregivers can do with kids.
7. Open access to the refrigerator and pantry all day now with limited structure to meal times now that we are working and schooling from home which can limit consumption of balanced meals and snacks.

What can we do to tackle some of these COVID-19 nutrition and eating issues happening at home right now?

While each family situation is certainly different and some of these options may be better suited to some than others, here are a few considerations:

#1 Get Outside: Out the Door by Four

In our family we started a new ritual called "Out the Door by Four" (aka by 4pm each day we must get outside for fresh air). We've done family walks, winter fat biking and tobogganing on a quiet hill. We also created a family fun list and are also looking forward to snow bocce ball, frisbee, badminton and a campfire to name a few. Not only does this help beat cabin fever, the sunlight bolsters mental health and physical activity is one of the best ways to battle stress. If mobility is a challenge for you I'd still encourage you to get outside and read a book, listen to the birds or do a craft.

#2 Use the Timing Technique

We may not have control over many things in life right now but we can structure our day with some set routines. Kids and adults thrive on some structure and routine to our meal timing. This you can control since open access to eating anytime rather than at set times can lead to overeating, making poor choices and kids not coming to the table hungry if they filled up on too many snacks throughout the day.

If you or your family members are making poor choices, struggling with overeating or undereating right now use what I call the Timing Technique to eat every 3-5 hours. Try and get up at the same time each day and refuse to spend all day in your PJ's. Ideally eat your first meal within about 1 hour of waking and then eat either a meal or snack every 3-5 hours.

The frequency of how often you eat through the day will vary person to person based on our own intuitive eating patterns. Some people will choose to eat 3 larger meals and no snacks and others will choose to eat 3 smaller meals and 3 small snacks (or any variation in between). The most important part is setting a

game plan for yourself and your family so food doesn't become a free for all of anything goes which will surely lead to a lack of healthy choices.

#3 Keep it Simple

The quote "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication" by Leonardo da Vinci comes to mind during these times.

Your brain is full and your heart is heavy. It may be a challenging time for you to think creatively about meal planning so give yourself permission to keep it super simple. You can get fancier later when you have more space in your brain and heart.

Meal planning made simple is knowing that we are going to select 3 things for balance for our breakfast, lunch and supper. The 3 things are:

- Grains/starches
- Veggies and/or fruit
- Source of protein

Use whatever you have in the house that works for this broad guideline. If you have more frozen veggies than fresh veggies in your house now go with those as they are excellent options from a nutrition perspective. If you have fresh fruit that needs to be used before it spoils, be sure to incorporate that. From a budget perspective you can also incorporate more meatless meals or stretch meat with adding canned legumes (for example add 2 extra cans of kidney beans to your family chili recipe or add lentils to your ground poultry taco meal).

Any final tips about how we can best manage our nutrition during the COVID-19 crisis?

I'd love it if you used this extra time at home together with your family as a gift. Eat together. Not only at supper around the dinner table but also at breakfast and/or lunch. If you live alone I'd like you to eat some of your meals or to share a coffee by phone or videoconference with a friend. Eating together is an important time of connection and we all need this more than ever.

We always prioritize supper meals together as a family but we also started eating lunch together as well. We pause on whatever we are doing as we work from home and simply eat together. My 9-year old son commented that while he misses school he likes eating lunch with us. Use this treasured time to connect over conversation, away from screens and negative news talk. Add a gratitude practice of one thing you are grateful for as this family habit we started many years ago grows into some super cool conversations, and is simply good for all of us as a reframe in difficult times.

Lastly, teach your kids to cook. This is a life skill that is often undervalued. Turn off the news and turn up the tunes and work with your family together on dividing and conquering meal prep and cooking together. While baking with your kids seems to be the go to choice, what they really need is to know how to cook your favorite family recipes so when they move away from home they don't live on fast food. If you suck at cooking yourself this is an awesome time for you and your kids to pull out the cookbooks in your home and watch SIMPLE cooking videos on how to make delicious food. Yes it will be messy, but you might be surprised how much fun you have. You also might be surprised that your kids that have always been picky may take a new interest in trying things they have been involved in preparing.