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COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION

# Making Health and Nutrition a Priority During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

March 18, 2020 by \*ASN Member Contributor



**T**here is little doubt that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is affecting every aspect of our lives—from virtual classrooms to telecommuting to early restaurant closing times to outright quarantines. Observing public health measures and reducing exposure to the virus are required to slow the spread of this disease. No one knows how long these virus safety measures will need to stay in place, but it presents a perfect time to protect and improve your health while practicing social distancing. Healthy eating is especially important for keeping your immune system in top condition. Here are some steps you can take to eat

healthy in the times of COVID.

*\* American Society for Nutrition members Carol Byrd-Bredbenner, PhD, RD, FAND, Kaitlyn Eck, PhD, RD, and Jaclyn Maurer Abbot, PhD, RD have contributed their advice for staying healthy during this time.*

## 3 Steps you can take to stay healthy during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic



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# 1. Minimize trips to the supermarket during the pandemic and eat healthy.

## Before you shop for Coronavirus preparations...

**Plan ahead.** Visualize breakfast, lunch, and dinner for at least 5 days. What will you serve? What do you need? Consider the foods your family likes, your food preparation methods, interests and skills, and the time and energy you will have for preparing meals. Working from home may not mean there is more time to cook—especially if you are now responsible for teaching your kids and doing the work your employer expects.

**Have children at home?** Include children in meal planning, preparation, and clean up while teaching them writing, math, reading, and science.

- **Reading/Writing:** Ask your kids to make a list of what's in the pantry and refrigerator. Then, have them look through cookbooks or online recipes sites to find meals and snacks that use up what is on hand. Have them share their breakfast, lunch, or dinner meal ideas.
- **Math:** Find math in measuring spoons and cups, counting out numbers of ingredients, taking stock of pantry items, or planning the time it will take to prepare, cook, eat, and clean up a meal.
- **Science:** Get kids involved in baking bread, cooking an egg, or creating a homemade salad dressing—then, search the internet to discover the science behind why ingredients change when they are combined, heated, or blended



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**Think nutrition.** The healthiest meals emphasize whole grains, vegetables, and fruits—serve them in the greatest amounts. Meat portions should be smaller—this will save money and help keep dietary saturated fat in check.

**Make a shopping list**—and use it! You'll be less likely to forget items or buy impulse items.

**Stock up on nutrition-packed foods that will stay fresh for a week or longer.**

- **Breads**—corn tortillas, whole grain English muffins, bagels, breads, wraps, frozen whole wheat waffles

- **Grains**—instant oatmeal, quick cooking pasta, frozen brown rice, couscous, refrigerated pizza crust
- **Fruits**—sturdy fresh fruit (apples, citrus), dried, plain frozen, canned in juice or water
- **Vegetables**—sturdy fresh veggies (celery, broccoli, onions, potatoes), plain frozen, low sodium canned, sun-dried
- **Sauces**—tomato pasta sauce, salsa
- **Soups & Broths**—canned, frozen, shelf-stable cartons
- **100% Juice**—refrigerated, frozen, canned, boxed
- **Milk**—fresh, canned, shelf-stable packages
- **Eggs**—fresh eggs, egg whites in cartons
- **Cheese**—sliced, cubed, shredded, crumbled, grated hard cheese
- **Beans/Legumes**—canned beans (black beans, chickpeas), dry beans
- **Nuts and seeds**—bagged, canned, nut butters
- **Chicken**—frozen or canned
- **Seafood**—frozen ready-to-cook fish fillets, frozen shrimp, canned tuna, salmon, and sardines
- **Beef**—pre-made frozen lean ground patties or meatballs
- **Flavorings**—add zing with dried herbs & spices, vinegars, mustard, hot/steak sauces, lemon/lime juice, light dressings, honey, Greek yogurt

**Go easy on the frozen dinners**—most are high in sodium, fat, and calories.

**Limit purchases of tempting foods** like chips, sodas, cookies, and



ice cream. They are high in empty calories and run up your grocery bill.

**Keep costs down**—consider low cost alternatives. Instead of buying ready-made hummus, pureed a drained can of chickpeas to make your own. Try a meatless meal, like chili with beans instead of beef. If fresh fruits and veggies are too costly—remember, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables provide the same nutrients as fresh. Best bets are plain frozen veggies and fruits. Go for low sodium canned veggies and fruits canned in juice or water—if these are in short supply, buy regular canned fruits and veggies—drain and rinse before use.

**Think about friends and neighbors, especially older adults or those with health conditions.** Could you save them a trip to the grocery store?

**Try online shopping**—it will save you time and let you keep your social distance. Be sure to play ahead, many stores need a day or two from order to delivery or pickup.

**While at the supermarket during the Coronavirus pandemic...**

**Use a disinfecting wipe**—wipe your hands and grocery cart handle, then put the wipe in the trash.



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**Prepared for the unexpected**—supermarkets are running low on many items. Be sure to take your own bags. Be ready with a back-up plan if an ingredient you need is unavailable.

**Keep the less fortunate in mind**—contribute to local pantries and soup kitchens now. Then, when it is all over—donate extra food you stocked up on that is still fresh and safe to eat.

**Use contactless payment or credit cards.** If you use the payment keypad, tap the buttons and screen with your knuckle—then use hand sanitizer after completing your payment.

## **2. Eat out safely during the Coronavirus pandemic with restaurant curfews**





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If you want to have take-out meals, take the food home right away and eat it while it is hot. Store leftovers safely—wrap tightly and refrigerate any dishes with meat, fish, poultry, or dairy products—be sure to reheat these leftovers thoroughly before eating.

### **Make eating together at home a positive experience**

Whether it is homemade or takeout, eating more meals at home is a new routine for many families. Keep the stress down by making mealtime fun.

- **Get the family involved**—kids can help set the table, pour the water, make the salad, or grate the cheese. Make mealtimes a family affair.

- **Try some new recipes**—if you have never made homemade pizza, roasted a whole chicken, or cooked meatballs from scratch—now is a good time to try! There are lots of great recipes on the internet! Look for those that call for only a few ingredients and use common kitchen tools.
- **Reconnect with the family**—eat together at the table or spread a blanket on the floor and have an indoor picnic. Be sure to separate mealtime and TV time—watching while eating makes it too easy to pay attention to TV and not your food, so you are likely to overeat. Wonder what to talk about at mealtime? Chat about things you will do this summer, tell jokes—just keep the conversation upbeat and fun.

### 3. Think Positive! Mindset is vital to getting through this pandemic physically and mentally healthy.



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- **Practice positive stress management strategies.** Walk the dog, call a friend, soak in the tub, or cuddle your kids. Skip the alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- **Stick with your routine as much as you can.** Go to bed and get up in the morning on your usual schedule. Eat meals at regular times. Find ways to exercise away from the gym—do yoga in the living room, trim the hedge, have a scavenger hunt in the backyard with your kids, or just toss a ball or play tag as a family.
- **Manage boredom.** Stay busy and engaged—resist hanging around the fridge or mindlessly watching TV. Enjoy your hobbies, read, cook, make videos with your kids, start a scrapbook, help your kids with their virtual schoolwork, and stay in touch with family, friends, and colleagues.

**When you do go out**, wash your hands before you leave home *and* as soon as you return.

**Have a dry cough? Feeling feverish? Hard time breathing?** Don't hesitate to reach out to your health care provider for further instructions.

We are all in facing this together. Let's make the most of it to come out stronger and wiser and ready to enjoy all the wonderful times to come!

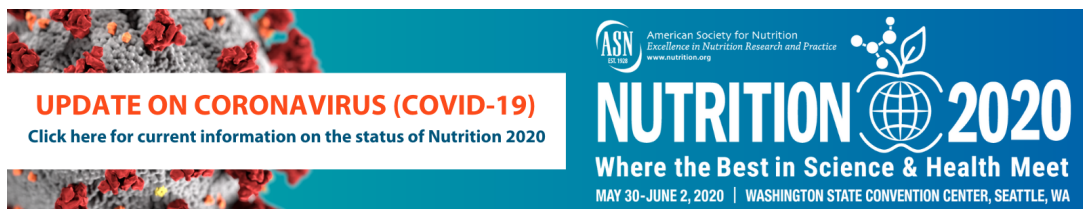
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After the publication of this article, contributor Jaclyn Abbot, PhD, RD, participated in a related interview with CNN's New Day Weekend broadcast on Sunday, March 22. [Read the transcript of the segment here.](#)

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