Not Going Out? You Can Still Eat Healthy

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This quarantine has forced us to lose our typical cooking, grocery shopping, and dining out routines. Many people are not used to working from home, being home all the time, and having to cook every day.

How have our eating habits changed? I’ve seen people falling into two groups.

On one side, there are people over-filling their plates with comfort foods and restaurant take out. Other people are cooking every meal at home, which means cooking more often and cleaning up the kitchen a few times a day, which can be a lot to maintain.
Make cooking easier and fun

Try food prepping. Chop all of your vegetables at once, then store them in the fridge. Cook more than you need for a single meal, and freeze leftovers. When you’re hungry, this will make cooking quicker and easier, so you’re less tempted to grab a snack instead of making a nutritious meal.

Vary your ingredients and meals as much as possible, so you don’t get tired of them and head for takeout.

Being in quarantine is a good time to experiment with new cuisines, ingredients, and recipes. Make it fun and include your partner or children for a low-stress experiment in the kitchen. Cook with family and friends through video chatting who are quarantining in their own homes, and share recipes. Being creative and less stressed about what’s for dinner can help you stay connected with others and your own nutrition during this time.
Make meals you enjoy

Focus on making home-cooked nourishing, satisfying, and pleasurable meals. If you eat nutritious foods that you don’t find pleasurable, you’re not going to be able to keep up with those healthy choices.

Think about the basics of a nutrient-packed plate.

Always include a protein because it’s definitely going to keep you more satisfied. Protein also helps your muscles grow and avoid muscle wasting if you’re undergoing any treatment or have any health condition. If you’re exercising, you want to build up a little bit of muscle strength and be stronger and increase your metabolic rate. Heart-healthy proteins include turkey and chicken, fish (not fried), eggs, feta cheese, Greek yogurt and kefir (also full of gut-supporting probiotics), and cottage cheese. There are also plant-based proteins like nuts, seeds, and pea and soy protein (which you can find in milk, tofu, and powders for smoothies).

When we’re thinking about carbohydrates, remember that these are not necessarily bad. Avoid sugar-added carbs to focus on fiber-rich foods like whole-grain bread, sweet potatoes, whole grain oats, brown rice, and other whole grains like farro, or pasta made from lentils or chickpeas. Beans and lentils, as well as fresh and frozen fruits, are also fiber-rich sources of carbohydrates. Fiber helps you stay full without the spikes and crashes that come with refined added sugars.

When it comes to fats, say yes (to some)

But, avoid eating too much-saturated fat (from meats and full-fat dairy) and trans fats (from fried foods). Focus on heart-healthy fats that come from nuts, seeds, avocado, eggs, fish, and lower-fat dairy (like cottage cheese). Snack on some walnuts one day, and enjoy some almond butter the next.
Variety and color are also important. Try to “eat the rainbow.” This means fruits and vegetables of various colors should be a staple in your diet. Dark leafy greens, red bell peppers, and tomatoes, orange carrots, yellow squash and banana, purple onion or eggplant, blueberries, pink radishes, black beans … there are endless possibilities to keep you to keep your diet full of various nutrients and minerals.

For those of you who don’t like veggies or cannot eat enough solid foods, try smoothies. You can even add veggies like spinach, kale, parsley, cucumber, sweet potato, celery, and ginger. Add protein-rich milk made from cashews, almonds, or pea protein. Or blend fruits and veggies with Greek yogurt. If you want it sweeter, add some banana, pineapple, or mango instead of sugar. Add extra fiber and heart-healthy omega-3s with flax or chia seeds. This way, you can get more of the rainbow in your diet.

Many of these foods I’m recommending are pretty simple and can keep for a while in your fridge and pantry. Mix and match these building blocks of a healthy diet; however, you want to make it work for you and your family.

**You don’t have to be perfect**

To have a balanced diet, you don’t have to eat vegetables or salads 100% of the time. It means that you have variety in your diet from all of the food nutrition groups (carbohydrates, proteins, and fats), and the majority of your meals are packed with nutrients.

Some days you can have a complete meal, and other days you might have a pizza delivered from that local Italian restaurant you miss going to. You can even make a pizza meal more balanced with a salad or sautéed greens on the side (instead of garlic rolls). The next day, you can go back to eating salmon with brown rice and asparagus.
This balance will help you stay on track and feel satisfied. You’ll support your immune system through nutrition while supporting your overall wellbeing with pleasurable meals and snacks.

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**Eating too much?**

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