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Logan Gilbert
Seattle University

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How to Maintain Strong Eating Habits During the Pandemic

Logan Gilbert, Investigative Editor

During a stressful time like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important to take care of your body and mind—in whatever way is best for you. Checking the fridge endlessly out of boredom, mindlessly eating chips and stress eating are unhealthy outlets for anxiety, and there can be better ways to stay mindful of your habits during the quarantine.

According to Edie Schreckengast, Seattle University's sports dietician, it is still important to prioritize health and diet during this time. Many students have become prone to strange schedules that involve getting out of bed at abnormal times. This can cause people to neglect keeping a schedule to eat, and as a result, mindful eating can be extremely useful, according to Schreckengast. One of the best things that you can do is to create reminders to ensure that you are continuing to eat three meals a day.

"It's important to remember your relationship with food, your body and movement," Schreckengast said. "It does impact your health and wellbeing, but also focus on trying to create a positive schedule or eating schedule, just like you would with class."

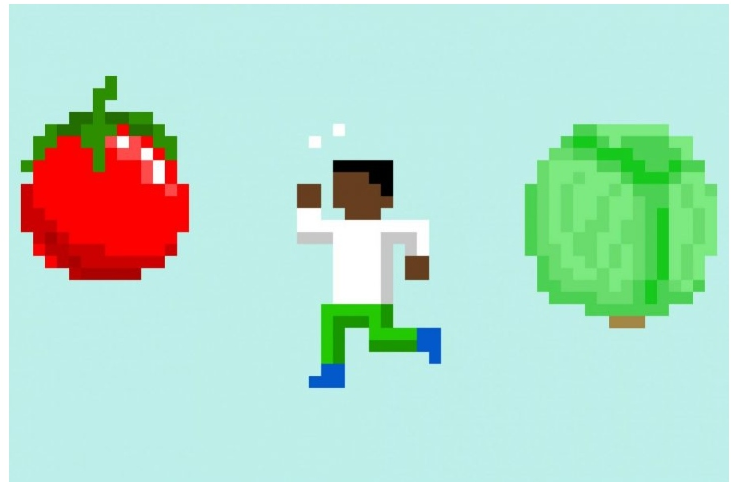
This is part of her overall goal of promoting healthy eating habits with practices that center consciously eating meals rather than mindlessly eating junk food. By actually putting away any distractions and technology and then sitting down with that meal or snack and really tasting it, according to Schreckengast, we can think more about the food that we are putting into our bodies.

However, it is also important to let go of perfectionism regarding your diet. These are very unusual times, which can cause a lot of stress and anxiety for people. Worrying about a 100% perfect and healthy diet shouldn't add stress to the situation. To Schreckengast, eating a bit of feel-good food that might not be the best for you is important because it can give you much-needed comfort during this time.

"You want to be kind to yourself during this time. Show yourself compassion and [don't] shame yourself or talk down to yourself if you do have a bag of chips," Schreckengast said. "Give yourself some compassion. You need to make sure you are eating quality nutritious foods, fruits and vegetables—but it's okay to have that bag of chips."

It can also be difficult to stay healthy with the current situations in stores. With many running out of stock on various food items, it is important to come prepared with backup plans in case the store doesn't have everything you need. Schreckengast advised to stock up on versatile foods that can be used in a variety of meals—especially nonperishables.

The store can also be a stressful place for those who live with, or are, elderly or immunosuppressed. Making sure you're aware of—and avoiding—peak store hours can help with the stress.



Leon Lee

"I think that's one of the biggest things—the sense of loss of usual control," Schreckengast said. "Sometimes we try and focus on what we can't control. So things are going to be a little less structured, and what we need to remember is that's okay."

There is also the unique challenge of being stuck indoors, causing people to burn less calories naturally in their day-to-day lives. Normally, many people walk around the city, spend time with friends and simply live more active lives. That doesn't mean you need to starve yourself to make up for the lost calorie burn, according to Schreckengast.

"Instead of thinking, 'I need to restrict my food intake,' I like to shift it to focus on getting plenty of fruits and vegetables," Schreckengast said. "Make sure that you're really filling up your plate with those foods and that you're not skipping meals because of snacks. I want to make sure not to restrict or focus on calories, but focus on creating color on your plate by adding more fruits and vegetables."

Another problem that has surfaced amidst the pandemic is its inevitable financial impact. When looking for ways to save money, you don't need to sacrifice health, Schreckengast added.

"You want to look for anything on sale, like in the frozen section, the fruits and veggies and also canned. You also can't go wrong with finding a meatless product. For example, beans and dried beans. You soak them, they're budget-friendly and they really make your dollar stretch," Schreckengast said.

Quarantine is a stressful time for everyone, and establishing a sense of normalcy with healthy routines is important. So before logging onto that 7:45 a.m. zoom class, remember that breakfast is the most important meal of the day—and don't forget your greens!