



Health Habit Self-Management During COVID-19 Pandemic

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WITH STRESS LEVELS HIGH and routines disrupted in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak, we are all feeling challenged to maintain healthy lifestyle habits. Based on months of conducting telehealth counseling, I've developed tips I hope you find useful. These tips can be used regardless of your results from the [Six Factor Quiz](https://drrobertkushner.com/quiz) (drrobertkushner.com/quiz).

EATING TIPS

- ✓ Whether ordering groceries online with curbside pickup, getting deliveries, or shopping yourself, do the best you can to make sure your list contains vegetables, fruits, and lean proteins—stocking up on canned and frozen produce as a safeguard for when your groceries run low.
- ✓ Keep higher calorie, fatty, sugary, and salty processed snack foods out of the house or out of sight.
- ✓ Use recipe websites like Cooking Light, EatingWell, MyRecipes, SkinnyTaste, or SparkRecipes to plan healthier meals and snacks.
- ✓ If you drink alcohol, enjoy as an occasional indulgence versus as a daily habit.
- ✓ Use extra time at home to explore new ways to cook healthy foods by dusting off rarely-used appliances or purchasing new ones if you have the resources, such as an air fryer, pressure cooker, nonstick pan for searing fish, salad chopper and chopping bowl, spiralizer, or juicer.
- ✓ Keep your work space food free if working remotely.
- ✓ Whether due to boredom or stress, if unplanned snacking is derailing your healthy eating plan, consider brushing teeth after meals to help break this unintended habit. As an added benefit, attending to oral health habits is now more important than ever since routine dental care has likely been delayed.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TIPS

- ✓ Take frequent breaks from prolonged sitting—set a timer (or use an app on your smartphone) to buzz, vibrate, or beep for a 5- to 10-minute break every hour or a 3-minute break every 30 minutes.
- ✓ Set a daily schedule for moving more, whether it's a daily walk outside (weather permitting and with precautions to stay safe), engaging in regular virtual workouts, working out at home using home exercise equipment, doing work around the house, gardening, or a combination of all of the above.
 - For outdoor walks, you can buddy up with your dog (if you have one) or meet up with family members and friends as long as you maintain 6-foot social distancing.
 - Find a virtual exercise class that sounds fun through your health club (if you have one) or stream classes through an online platform, such as Amazon Prime, Peloton (no bike required), Sworkit, Seven Minute Workout, or YouTube. Many free classes are available and run the gamut from dance to yoga to strength workouts.
- Do calisthenics or play video exercise games with your children. Use counters for pushups. Climb stairs in your house, building, or around your neighborhood. For strength training, use soup cans or filled water bottles if you don't have hand weights. Exercise bands, which can be ordered online, are another way to work your muscles at home for a small cost. If you have home exercise equipment, like a treadmill or bike, move it to a room with a TV where it is more likely be used.
- Remember that doing work around the house such as cleaning out the garage, washing a car, cleaning your house, or doing some gardening counts too.

DE-STRESSING TIPS

- ✓ Build your own de-stressing toolbox:
 - Need more joy? Need to find a way to relax? Call a friend, text a loved one, listen to music, play with a pet, meditate, read a good book, write in a journal, engage in a hobby, play a game, or use an app (such as Insight Timer, Calm, or Headspace, to name just a few).
 - Want to boost energy and feel better? Engage in physical activities that enhance mind-body connection: take a walk outside to get fresh air and connect with nature, participate in a virtual yoga class, or do a home stretching program.
 - No more lunch out with friends or extended family members? Schedule regular online meetings or virtual gatherings instead.
 - No more in-person group lessons or events? Find virtual alternatives for things you enjoy such as an exercise class, a guitar lesson, a card game, or a book group.
- ✓ Promote feelings of productivity and gratitude.
 - Make time for an activity that brings you a sense of accomplishment, such as organizing a drawer, pantry, or closet.
 - Put limits on less productive behaviors, such as watching too much TV or drinking too much alcohol.
 - Remind yourself of the aspects of your life that you are most grateful for, such as having a roof over your head, food on the table, and family members and friends who care about you.
- ✓ If needed, get professional help virtually.
 - If you're having trouble managing your stress level on your own, reach out to your primary care or mental health provider; telehealth visits by phone or video chat are now being conducted across the country.

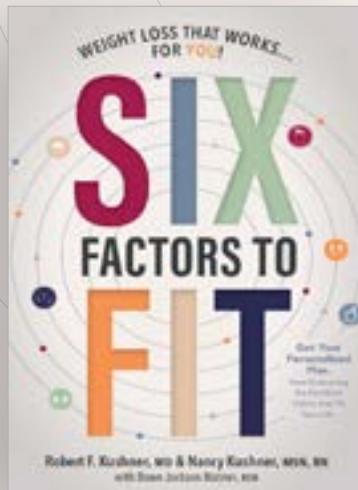
SLEEP TIPS

- ✓ Since sleep is restorative, especially during stressful times, follow sleep hygiene tips such as the ones listed below:
 - Set a sleep onset and wake-up time, and use an alarm in the morning to ensure you get enough hours of restful sleep (aim for 7 to 8 hours per night).
 - Develop a bedtime ritual where you unplug from the news and listen to music, read a book, or take a relaxing bath instead.
 - Pay attention to the types of foods you eat at dinner and after, as spicy foods, coffee, chocolate, alcohol, and large portions close to bedtime can cause reflux and interrupt sleep.
 - Be aware of how one night of poor sleep can sap your motivation to eat well and be active the next day.

TRACKING TIPS

- ✓ Self-monitor eating habits to stay on track.
 - If a certain time of day is difficult for you to maintain healthy eating habits (such as kids' snack times, after dinner, or when you are feeling stressed), consider tracking your food intake during these times using one of the commercial or government trackers available online or as an app.
 - Just the simple act of tracking can make you feel more in control and motivate you to make healthier choices.
 - Tracking can be done in real time (as you eat and drink) or proactively (in advance) as a strategy to plan your day.
- ✓ Self-monitor physical activity habits to stay on track.
 - Whether you keep track with pen and paper, use a spreadsheet or a smartphone app, confirming that you stuck to your physical activity plan strengthens motivation and provides a sense of accomplishment.
- Track your 24-hour activity cycle—sleep, sedentary behavior, and engagement in daily activities and exercise. With this data at your fingertips, you can make adjustments to strike a healthy balance.
- ✓ Practice self-weighing.
 - If you are trying to keep your body weight in check, it is important to have data to reflect on. Weighing at least once or twice weekly allows you to monitor your progress toward losing or maintaining weight.
 - Place your scale on a hard surface on the floor for greater accuracy.
 - Preferably, weigh yourself at the same time of day with light clothes.

In the midst of the coronavirus outbreak, healthy lifestyle habits don't have to come to a screeching halt. Hoping you stay safe and be well!



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