

Healthy Lifestyle During Corona Crisis: One Goal a Day

When the kids need you during all hours of the day, the house chores are piling up and your health and financial worries are swamping you, it isn't easy to find the strength required to lead the healthy lifestyle you'd like. During these times, you can try choosing one small goal every day to maintain a healthy lifestyle.



Leading a Healthy Lifestyle

Taking care of the children that are home now, with no schedule, no socializing with friends and no options to go out, requires quite a bit of energy. Social distancing and following hygienic rules don't allow us to share the burden with Grandma and Grandpa or other relatives, so you're probably exhausted all the time. Maintaining a set routine and a healthy lifestyle is especially important during these times. Taking care of yourselves with a varied and healthy diet, quality sleep and routine exercise can help you raise your energy levels.

Other than helping you feel good, the way you care for yourselves has an effect on your children. As parents, the things that guide your children's behavior are the things you do yourselves. When you make sure to exercise and follow a healthy diet, you're encouraging your kids to develop healthy habits.

Creating Small Successes

Even though healthy behavior is important, during these times it's impossible to do everything. Striving to maintain a perfectly healthy routine can cause a lot of frustration or despair, and can be discouraging. Lower your expectations to ease the pressure. Try choosing one goal a day, and try to manage just that one. These small successes, for you and your children, contribute to feelings of pride and self-confidence. They give you the strength to keep going and to overcome other challenges in these complex times.

A Healthy Diet

Eating healthy and balanced meals and snacks nourishes the body and provides you with the energy you need to perform optimally throughout the day. Balanced meals begin with you getting to know the nutritional components your body needs:

- **Carbohydrates** - provide your body with available energy. Foods with more nutritional fibers break down more slowly, keeping a high level of energy over time. For example: whole grains, potatoes, or rice.
- **Protein** - important for repairing and building tissue in your body. For example: meat, fish and legumes.
- **Vitamins** - important for your immune system and your body's health in general. Different vitamins can be found in a variety of plant-based foods like vegetables, nuts or grains, as well as animal products like eggs, meat and fish.
- **Minerals** - like calcium, iron and zinc. Minerals are essential for your body to function properly and they are consumed through food. Different animal products and plant-based foods have different levels of varying minerals.
- **Phytochemicals** - protect your body from different diseases. Are found in plant-based foods like fruits and vegetables, grains, legumes and seeds.
- **Drinking** - it is important to avoid dehydration for your body's proper function. The recommended amount is eight cups of water a day.

To consume all the nutritional components, you need to combine foods from all the main food groups: fruit, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, lean meat and fish and low-fat foods.

A Healthy Eating Environment

When the house is stocked mostly with healthy food, the kids are expected to develop healthy eating habits. Make sure to stock the fridge and cabinets with healthy foods, so that they're available on a daily basis. Allow them to consume foods that can be bad for their health "once in a while", but limit their availability in your home. Avoid having snacks, soft drinks, candy, processed or high-fat foods around the house. Instead, keep bowls of fruit in a permanent spot that's easily accessible and visible. This way the kids will be able to choose healthy alternatives when they feel like having a snack.

A balanced meal doesn't have to be a lot of work or take up a lot of your time - you can make quick meals like fresh pasta with vegetables, an omelet and a salad, yogurt and fruit. Here are a few ideas that can help you quickly put together a nourishing meal, even when you're tired:

- Cut up vegetable sticks and use dips like cheese or hummus as a quick healthy snack.
- Use frozen vegetables and legumes to prepare the meals faster.
- Canned goods can also help diversify your meals and make their preparation easier. Keep crushed tomatoes, canned vegetables and legumes and canned fish, like tuna and sardines, around the house and include them in your meals.
- Combine fresh nuts and almonds in your meals, they're a good source of protein and healthy fat.
- Cook one-pot meals to cut down on dish washing.
- Prepare larger amounts and freeze servings to use later.
- Keep leftovers and use them to prepare light meals and sandwiches.

Family Meals

Family meals are important to any age and help kids develop good and healthy eating habits. Eating together allows you to set an example for healthy eating habits and send a positive message about choosing healthy food. Setting specific times for meals will help you create an eating routine, that allows the kids to focus during the meals and minimizes the need for snacks throughout the day. Define meal times ahead and turn off the screens, so that you'll be able to calmly sit together.

Eating with the rest of the family helps picky toddlers and young children learn to try new foods. This is a great opportunity to learn skills like using utensils, table manners and proper behavior. When you sit down to eat with your kids the meal becomes quality family time. Through the conversation around the table, your child learns how to communicate, talk when it's their turn and listen. Create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere and show interest in your kids, share the things you did and your thoughts with them and encourage them to share with you. If your child doesn't want to talk, don't pressure them- allow them to spend time with you and listen to the other family members.

Cooking Together

A great way to encourage healthy eating habits is to involve the kids in planning the meals and preparing them. This way the kids take part in choosing the foods, and you encourage them to take interest in what they eat. This is an opportunity to introduce them to a variety of fresh and healthy foods and to teach them how to prepare them. Kids that help prepare a meal feel proud and involved, and they're happier to eat what you prepared together. Ask toddlers to take things out of the fridge for you, mix or wash. Kids can take part in planning the menu and helping out with a variety of simple tasks to prepare the food. Teenagers can take upon themselves to prepare one healthy meal a week. Make sure to praise your kids and thank them for helping; referring specifically to what they did.

Exercise

Exercise is essential for growing, healthy development and maintaining a healthy body over time. Daily exercise keeps your heart healthy, develops muscles, helps with good posture and maintains healthy body weight. It even helps with your mood, concentration and self-confidence. The Ministry of Health recommends an hour of medium or vigorous exercise every day. Try integrating an hour of enjoyable exercise into your family's daily routine. It doesn't have to be all at once - you can accumulate 60 minutes of exercise throughout the day. Exercise while listening to music that you like or allow your kids to choose the music you listen to. You can try different activities together and choose the ones you liked the most. Personal example is extremely important here as well, so that your child will be active and also try things out. Praise and encourage them when they exercise, whether it's planned or spontaneous.

Toddlers and Young Children

It's part of young children's nature to enjoy moving around and being active. It is important to reinforce this and choose fun activities. Be creative and try integrating different games into your exercise. Present the activity as a game and not as exercise. You can use some of the following ideas:

- Use a ball to practice shooting into an improvised basket and kicking.
- Create an obstacle course and encourage your kids to keep their balance, crawl, climb and jump.
- Dance to the sound of music that you like, add funny or silly moves. Let your kids lead from time to time.
- Make up a game that includes jumping, running or chasing.
- Blow soap bubbles and encourage your kids to catch them, or throw a balloon and try to keep it from touching the floor.

Adolescence

The physical activity levels drop, but this is actually when it's most important for teenager's physical and mental health. Help them plan the exercise they'll do ahead: think about when, where, and who they'll exercise with. Prepare a list of activities they can try; look online together for ideas that you like. Show personal example and be active yourselves. If you find an activity you both like you can even spend time doing it together.

Sleep During an Unsteady Routine

A good night's sleep improves your mood and keeps up your energy levels for the day ahead. Maintaining healthy and quality sleeping patterns will help your kids be calmer and more relaxed the next day, will allow parents to have personal time for themselves and will improve everybody's physical and mental health. Just like your kids need sleep to stay healthy, you also need enough sleep so that you can enjoy parenting. So even though there's no need to get up early for school and work, and naturally the lines tend to blur, try keeping a set bedtime according to the child's needs. The required sleeping hours vary according to age:

- Toddlers need 10-12 hours of sleep at night (in addition to an afternoon nap).
- Kindergarten children need 11-13 hours of sleep.
- Elementary school children need 10-11 hours of sleep.
- Teenagers need 9-10 hours of sleep.
- Adults need approximately 7-8 hours of sleep.

How Can You Help Create Quality Sleep?

- Insist on a set bedtime for young kids, around 19:00 or 20:00.
- Eat dinner at a reasonable hour to avoid feeling stuffed and uncomfortable while sleeping.
- Avoid consuming drinks and foods that contain a lot of sugar or caffeine in the evening.
- Become less active and create a calm and positive atmosphere in the hour before going to sleep: take a bath, read a book or listen to quiet music.
- Keep a quiet and clean sleep environment in the bedroom. Remove screens, like televisions, computers and phones, and turn off the lights. You can allow a small night light.
- With young kids, create a permanent and positive bedtime routine, that can include things like brushing their teeth, a story and a kiss. After this leave the room, and make clear to your child that they need to stay in bed quietly until they fall asleep.
- Try waking your child up at the same time every morning, even when they don't need to get up and get ready to leave the house. Allow an extra hour of sleep in the morning on the weekends.
- From the age of five and up, avoid sleep during the day

Dealing with Worries and Nightmares

If your child complains about bad thoughts and worries before sleep, you can try taking deep breaths with them to help them calm down. You can choose a familiar and positive book that contains a pleasant place that your child can imagine. Ask them to imagine the picture in their head and describe the details they see in their imagination. Another technique that can be used during the day is a worry box: ask your child to write down or draw their worries and then think about and discuss possible solutions with them. Put the worries in the box before going to sleep, to clear space in their minds and allow the worries to rest.

If your child wakes up in the middle of the night from a nightmare, hug them and tell them they were having a bad dream. Promise them that they are safe and that everything is ok, and give them a kiss. Don't belittle or dismiss the nightmare and the fears your child presents. Listen to them and tell them that even though dreams like this can be very scary, they don't really hurt children. If you notice specific content that repeats itself over and over again in the nightmares, gently try to find out the source of the distress or stress that is hiding beneath the nightmare's content so that you can deal with it. If necessary, if your child has terrible dreams and suffers from a lot of anxiety throughout the day, turn to a professional for help.