

Exercise & Nutrition

This whole coronavirus situation has taught me that even when I have literally nothing else to do, I still won't workout

8:51 PM · 3/22/20 · Twitter for iPhone

4 Retweets 35 Likes



Day two of quarantine. We have figured out that a muffin is just a diet cupcake.

9:40 AM · 3/17/20 · Twitter for Android

Topics Covered

- Benefits of exercise
- Benefits of healthy nutrition
- Cheat Days!
- Strategies for individuals, parents, and families

Wellness Wednesdays

03/25/2020

We've all heard it before, the benefits of exercise and a healthy diet are endless. Glowing skin, boundless energy, increased lifespan, etc., etc. All true, all valid, all important.

I don't want to bore you all with that, but I feel that during this time it is still important to discuss the topic. As I previously mentioned, COVID-19 has greatly changed the way we all work, connect, and function. Toilet paper has seemingly become more valuable than gold, the meat aisles in supermarkets seem to only have the meats you don't like left, and I don't know about you, but fruits and vegetables don't seem all that appealing after other people's hands have funneled through them to find the perfect avocado.

These things may seem minor, but they can also be huge disruptions to the typical grocery run that we're all used to having. And with disruptions comes increased stress, and with increased stress comes ice cream, frozen pizzas, and cookies.

On top of that, working out from home when your gym is closed is mentally exhausting. A friend I was speaking to recently, that has remained focused with their training said it best, "the dumbbells in my kitchen weigh exactly the same as the dumbbells in the gym; accountability just hits different".

Think about that, when we have access to our gyms, to our safe space to exercise, we enter a mode where we are focused and often times supported by the collective energy in the air of people trying to improve and/or maintain their current fitness. But not at home, at home the weights feel 10 times as heavy, and we may succumb to the grips of our beds, couches, and a Netflix series.

Without gyms being open, we lose the entire process that prepares our minds and body for the workout. We lose the need to put on our gym clothes, we lose the commute, we lose the pump-up, we lose that often necessary tension that pushes us through our workouts.

Below you'll find the typical benefits associated with consistent exercise and healthy nutrition, as well as strategies you can use for yourself, with you friends, and with your families to stay strong, healthy, and well during these trying times.

Contact Me

Greater Lakes Child
Advocacy Center

95 Water Street
Laconia, NH

603-499-7504

Awolff@cac-nh.org



Benefits of Exercise

- **Endorphins and Enkephalins**
 - These are our “feel good” hormones and often help make problems and stressors seem much more manageable.
- **Quieting of the Mind**
 - The focus dedicated towards exercise alone is often enough to silence our thoughts reducing tendencies towards negative thinking, rumination, and anxiety.
- **Exercise directly impacts and changes the way the brain functions**
 - Exercise increases volume and blood supply to key parts of our brain, providing it with increased oxygen and nutrients for better overall functioning (Sharma, Madaan, & Petty, 2006).

Benefits of Healthy Nutrition

- **Impact on the gut microbiome**
 - Researchers have begun examining how our healthy gut bacteria impacts our mental health (Rogers et al., 2016).
 - Whole and unprocessed foods have been shown to improve the “good” bacteria in our bodies.
 - These “good” bacteria are crucial in nutrient absorption and the production of serotonin.
 - Serotonin is a brain chemical responsible for sleep, appetite, and mood regulation.
- **Reduced risk of depression**
 - Evidence has recently suggested that changes to healthier eating habits correlate with lessened symptoms of depression across the population utilizing a variety of different diets and nutrition plans (Firth et al., 2019).
- **Long-lasting energy and focus**
 - Whole grains and healthy fats provide cleaner energy sources for the body and reduce the likelihood of crashing in comparison to consuming sugars and other quick burning carbohydrates.
- **Children and Teens**
 - Higher prevalence of hyperactivity and inattentiveness among children and teenagers who consume fast food, sugar, and soft drinks.
 - Children who did not consume a healthy diet of fruits, vegetables, and fatty fish were more likely to present with inattentiveness and hyperactivity (Ferreira-García & Izquierdo-Pulido, 2017).

Side note on the infamous cheat day:

Much of the research out there on nutrition and dieting can often become overwhelming and make many of us panic about how our food will impact our health tomorrow, next week, next year, and so on. It is important to recognize that we all sometimes need a break from the monotony of dieting or healthy eating, sometimes that break will look like a pint of Ben & Jerry's, sometimes it will look like one small Hershey's kiss.

Cheat days are okay, just make sure you can manage the impact of the cheat day. Sometimes that Hershey kiss is all we need before kicking back into our healthy nutrition, other times it can make us crave even more sugary, energy-dense foods. The more mindful we are of this potential impact, the more controlled our eating will likely be.

Strategies during COVID-19

Exercise:

- **If you are already part of a local gym/community fitness program see what online options are currently being offered.**
 - Some gyms offer online programming for those of us who may not have weights & machines at homes.
 - Other gyms are utilizing Zoom and other video-chat platforms to continue having classes with their community.
 - Recruit your friends to do a home workout with you over a video-chat platform.
- **Participate in an online challenge, or challenges going on through social media, join a #Movement.**
- **Turn your workouts into a game/challenge and have your children compete against you.**
 - This will help motivate you and it will help keep your children active and expend some of their energy.
 - There is nothing like beating Mom or Dad in a push-up or burpee competition. Boost their self-esteem while you boost your fitness!
- **For those of you that like to lift weights:**
 - Household appliances and materials serve as great alternatives to weights.
 - Stuff a backpack with clothes, books, or other objects this can serve as an alternative to a squat bar or weight vest.
 - Fill up an empty gallon container with water and you've got an 8lb dumbbell/kettlebell.
 - Use household furniture as another weight alternative. Just make sure to do so in a safe way for both you and the weight alternative.
- **If it's nice, get outside and get some sunlight while you walk, run, or exercise.**
 - Vitamin D plays an integral role in our energy levels. Low levels of Vitamin D have consistently been linked with symptoms of Depression (Penckofer, Kouba, Byrn, & Estwing, 2010).
 - If getting outdoors is difficult due to weather and other variables consult with a medical professional on Vitamin D supplementation.
- **Clean your floors and walk on a treadmill at the same time with this fun strategy:**
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBxMiTj1K18>

Nutrition:

- **Try to continue filling your plates with whole, unprocessed foods.**
- **Limit sugar intake as much as possible, especially for kids.**
 - They will be expending much less energy while staying indoors, that sugar rush could become quite the stressor during work hours for those of you working from home.
- **Limit caffeine intake to reduce stress and anxiety during days confined to your home.**
- **Be strategic in your snacking.**
 - Limit snacking to a certain time period in the day (i.e. following a workout/exercise).
 - For those of you that count calories or macros allocate a specific portion to snacks.
- **Set specific meal and snack times for yourself and your family.**
- **Involve your children and make games out of mealtime.**
 - Who can have the most colorful plate?
 - Who can eat the most vegetables?
- **Involve your kids in the cooking process.**
 - Younger kids may have a hard time eating more nutritious foods, involving them in the cooking process can increase their intrigue and willingness to try to new foods or eat a healthy meal.
- **Provide non-food rewards to your kids to reduce snack/sugar intake. Let them know what they earned and why! Examples:**
 - Pick a movie to watch after dinner.
 - Pick a bedtime story.
 - Pick a game for the family to play together.

Final thoughts:

It's been tough to stay motivated during all this uncertainty, and it's been far too easy to enter a downward spiral of inactivity, unhealthy eating, and negative self-talk. It doesn't need to be perfect, it doesn't need to happen every day, but the more we engage in a healthy lifestyle, the more likely we are to reap the benefits of it and maintain that lifestyle tomorrow, next week, and even next year. Use what works best for you and your family. We are all different and will find success in our fitness, nutrition, and mental health in different ways. Find out what works for you, keep at it, and stay healthy!

Sources:

Ferreira-García, E., & Izquierdo-Pulido, M. (2017). The Mediterranean Diet and ADHD in Children and Adolescents. *PEDIATRICS*, 139(2).

Firth, J., Marx, W., Dash, S., Carney, R., Teasdale, S. B., Solmi, M., Stubbs, B., Schuch, F. B., Carvalho, A. F., Jacka, F., & Sarris, J. (2019). The Effects of Dietary Improvement on Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 81(3), 265–280. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000673>

Penckofer, S., Kouba, J., Byrn, M., & Estwing Ferrans, C. (2010). Vitamin D and depression: where is all the sunshine?. *Issues in mental health nursing*, 31(6), 385–393. <https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840903437657>

Rogers, G., Keating, D., Young, R. *et al.* From gut dysbiosis to altered brain function and mental illness: mechanisms and pathways. *Mol Psychiatry* 21, 738–748 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1038/mp.2016.50>

Sharma, A., Madaan, V., & Petty, F. D. (2006). Exercise for mental health. *Primary care companion to the Journal of clinical psychiatry*, 8(2), 106. <https://doi.org/10.4088/pcc.v08n0208a>

Andrew Wolff, M.S., LMFT
Mental Health Clinician
