WFH | Here's how to stay on top of your nutrition, fitness and mindfulness

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The coronavirus has upended many routine aspects of daily life for just about everyone.

We can no longer dine in restaurants or otherwise gather around food. Gyms are closed, making it more difficult to stick to workout regimens. And the pandemic's uncertain nature is a cause for anxiety for many people.

Lo Que Pasa spoke with University experts about nutrition, fitness and mindfulness, and asked their advice on how to stay on top of each.

What to eat

Many of the lifestyle changes forced upon us by COVID-19 directly impact what and how we eat. In addition to losing the ability to eat inside restaurants, those of us working at our kitchen tables are just a few paces from the fridge, making it easier than ever to snack all day.

Melanie Hingle, associate professor in the Department of Nutrition and a registered dietician nutritionist, offers the following advice for staying on top of your nutrition:

**Stock your pantry with a mix of perishable and nonperishable items.** Hingle's own pantry includes:

- Beans
- Lentils
- Broths
- Canned meats such as tuna and salmon
- Canned tomatoes
- Tomato paste
- Coconut milk
- Evaporated milk
- Pasta

These items can then be supplemented with perishable ingredients, such as fruit, eggs and fresh meat, picked up during weekly trips to the grocery store. Fruit, Hingle notes, can be kept around a bit longer if stored in the fridge.

**Focus on ingredients.** Unlike canned soups or frozen dinners, staples such as those listed above are much more versatile since they can be used to make soups, salads or pasta dishes.

**Keep plenty of noncaloric drinks handy.** Water is obviously the best way to stay hydrated, but when you're in the mood for something more appealing, make sure it's an alternative such
as iced tea or sparkling water, and not something loaded with sugar or calories.

**Resist using food to cope with stress.** Rather than turning to a snack when you're feeling anxious, consider an activity such as taking a walk. And if you drink alcohol, try to enjoy it with others – from a distance.

With restaurant dining rooms closed for the foreseeable future, most meals will be homemade. That's great for those who love to cook, but it might seem daunting for those who don't. Hingle says to stick with what you know, and don't force yourself to undertake cooking projects that don't appeal to you.

"Be very forgiving with yourself right now," she says. "Everyone's got a lot on their mind and certainly nobody should feel pressured to spend an hour in the kitchen."

She also points to recipes from *The Garden Kitchen* [2], a program run by Cooperative Extension, as an excellent resource.

Hingle, whose research involves economically underserved populations, says it's important to keep those groups in mind at a time like this. Avoid panic buying and hoarding food, she says, and consider ways that you can help the Campus Pantry [3] and the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona [4].

"It's really about how we can all come together and think about the people who are really struggling and make access easier for them," she says.

**How to stay in shape**

Campus Recreation [5] facilities closed on March 17 in response to directives from the city of Tucson to slow the spread of the coronavirus. But that doesn't mean employees can't stay active, even those of us who are spending the majority of our time at home, said Leah Callovini and Jake Minnis, fitness and wellness coordinators at Campus Recreation.

For those who are used to being more active, with trips to the gym several times a week, this might be a good opportunity to try some exercises they don't typically do, Callovini says, such as taking a run during the lunch hour, which may be more logistically feasible while working from home.

Continuing to do something, she says, is the key.

"Not losing all of your activity is what the goal is here – it's not going to be perfect," she says. "If you're used to just going to the weight room, this is your time to maybe incorporate a little bit more cardio, a little bit more mobility and flexibility exercises."

For those who don't actively stick to exercise routines, now could be a convenient time to try, Minnis and Callovini say.

And it doesn't have to take up large portions of the day.

"This is actually a really good opportunity for some people because now they have more opportunities to play with their dog or play with their kid during the day," Minnis says.

Sitting at a desk all day, whether at home or at the office, comes with consequences, Minnis says, such as anterior pelvic tilt [6] or slouched and rolled shoulders. Both suggest establishing
a routine and, if necessary, setting alarms to remind yourself to get up and do some house chores or take a walk.

Callovini and Minnis suggest the following exercises, all of which can be done with household items or your own body weight:

- Glute bridges [7]
- Planking [8]
- Wipers [9]
- Bent-over rows [10] with heavy items such as jugs of laundry detergent or milk
- Sit-to-stand exercises [11] with or without a dining room chair
- Kneeling hip flexor stretch [12]
- Wall stretches [13] using a doorframe

Campus Rec staff members are also producing virtual fitness resources for the University community amid the pandemic, including online fitness classes, which are expected to be available in April. Classes will be held via IMLeagues.com [14], and will require an account through the website. To create an account, select the University of Arizona from the list of schools and sign up with your University email address.

More information about upcoming virtual fitness resources will be announced via Campus Rec's main Instagram account [15] and its fitness and wellness Instagram account [16].

How to focus on the now

In the midst of a pandemic, some may be prone to letting anxiety take over as we worry about what the future holds.

Mindfulness, or the deliberate practice of living in the moment and suspending judgment about the experience, may help some avoid fixating on potential negatives, says Leslie Langbert [17], executive director of the Center for Compassion Studies [18].

"When there’s so much unfolding and so much unknown about this pandemic, we can get caught in fear," Langbert says.

For some, she says, it might be helpful to focus on "bringing our awareness back, into now, in this moment, what is happening."

Mindfulness practice takes many forms and levels of involvement, from simple breathing exercises to meditation, but it doesn't require carving out whole sections of a day, Langbert says.

She recommends finding ways to incorporate mindfulness practice into everyday activities. To illustrate this, Langbert described a friend's mindfulness practice, which uses the act of washing dishes as a metaphor.

"He will visualize or think about the soap on the plate as being love and compassion and the water rinsing off or washing away the suffering in the world," she says. "We can bring our full attention and awareness to whatever the activity is that we're doing, or we can bring a beautiful metaphor to it."

For those who want a more focused practice but don't know where to start, Langbert offers a seven-minute exercise
that she recorded earlier this month. She also points to apps such as Insight Timer, Headspace and Calm. All three apps offer some free features, then more features for a fee.

No matter what you do to be mindful, keep it simple, Langbert says.

"The one thing you don't want to do is feel like the practice of mindfulness is going to be something that's going to bring more stress to your routine," she says. By tying it into an activity you already perform on a regular basis, "it's like you're bringing it into something you're already doing rather than feeling like, 'Oh, I have to schedule this.'"

For the most updated information about the University's response to the coronavirus pandemic, please visit the COVID-19 information page [20].

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Links
[18] http://compassioncenter.arizona.edu/