**EATING WELL DURING LOCKDOWN**

For most of us, lockdown has meant a lot more time at home, with our usual routines and habits changed and forgotten.  I know how easily people can develop bad habits, such as lack of exercise and undisciplined eating.  Here are my suggestions for how these habits can be addressed.

The first step to achieving better eating and exercise habits is good planning:

**Plan your meals before you shop.**  Identify in advance all the ingredients you will need for meals that will leave you feeling fuller-for-longer.  That way you reduce the risk of an empty fridge or cupboard tempting you to buy fast foods – these may give you a quick energy rush, but the energy from fast foods is soon gone, leaving you feeling tired and still hungry. A good diet starts when you shop.

Plan in advance how to reduce potential snacking problems.  Avoid foods higher in refined sugar such as fruit juices or yogurts with added sugar. Instead, have available a range of healthy snacks, such as fresh fruits, nuts, rice cakes or veggie sticks with hummus and boiled eggs. You may find it helps if you portion out your snacks into small bowls or plates and be c think about sitting down before eating. This reduces the temptation to eat straight from the package or fridge.

**Shop for health.**Choose foods such as wholegrains, legumes (beans, oats, rice and lentils), fruits and other vegetables.  These are important to fuel us before and after exercise and these allow food to be broken down and used more readily for energy.

We should all ideally aim for at least five servings of different coloured vegetables per day, and two servings of fruit, to incorporate the varied essential micronutrients that are so important for gut health. One way to look at this is trying to eat colourfully – aim for a rainbow plate which kids can also enjoy.

Oily fish (such as tuna or salmon) and avocado are also excellent sources of long term energy and have many benefits such as being a protective factor against some diseases.

You should aim to vary your diet, so that over a period of days you eat a wide range of foods.

**Eat regularly**. Plan to eat 3 healthy meals per day and set regular meal times, even if you don’t feel as hungry as before. You may be exercising less or you may be snacking more. Think what adjustments you need to make.  It can be hard to keep track of time over lockdown but eating 3 meals spaced out through the day is important to keep a healthy body and mind, including the vitamins and minerals the body requires daily and giving us energy to keep active, complete tasks for work and daily life, as well as boosting immunity.  Such regular spacing helps your brain and body function.

**Exercise and movement are a vital part of our nutrition programme.** Fight inertia by creating an exercise routine, going for regular walks around the house or using opportunities as they arise; such as making TV add breaks a fun challenge to do a number of squats, push ups or steps.

Being more sedentary also means burning fewer calories.  On days we are less active we do not need fuel so quickly, so healthy fats such as seeds, nuts, avocado, oily fish and eggs are sufficient to give us enough longer-lasting energy around the home.

**Boredom**. During lockdown we may be bored with preparing food. Cooking for yourself or for the family day after day can be dull and time is very often at a premium.  You could plan to use a quieter time, over a weekend perhaps, to prepare some meals for the coming week.  Cook two or three times as much and pack the leftovers away in the freezer. For example, pasta (as part of a balanced diet), dahl, soups and stew all freeze extremely well – and they also can be packed with lots of vegetables (remembering of course to use as many different colours as possible to ensure our micronutrient needs are being met).

Make a splash for special occasions.  If you do have some spare time and are feeling inventive in the kitchen, don’t be afraid to experiment.  Look up some different recipes and use them as a way to teach kids about nutrition and the importance of a well-balanced diet, and encourage them to think about achieving this themselves.  The shared experience of Zoom cooking and dinners can create shared dietary encouragement.

**Don’t forget the essentials**:

A well rounded balanced diet is important for the correct intake of all vitamins and minerals which help the body function optimally.  These include Vitamin D which helps calcium to be absorbed by the body.  Sunshine is the best source of Vitamin D, though it is also present in oily fish, egg yolks and liver.

Adults are recommended to drink at least 2 litres (3.5 pints) of water per day. Hydration increases energy and relieves fatigue, promotes weight loss, and flushes out toxins as well as other benefits.

In summary, setting regular times for waking, going to sleep, exercise and meals; planning meals to make sensible choices at the shop and sharing meal ideas with family and friends are all great ways to support good habits.    In these difficult times, routines also help us to avoid becoming stressed and over-thinking.  Try not to put pressure on yourself, and aim to achieve your lifestyle changes by a series of small steps.

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