

SCRIPT – PRINT - Making Better Food Choices during Shelter in Place

A Few Subtle Changes Can Make a Big Difference

For the past few months, Americans have been using their homes for workspace and children for classrooms, in an effort to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

While there are advantages to being tucked away at home, shelter-in-place also has its pitfalls, especially when it comes to eating.

A Gallup report revealed that social distancing is contributing to poor diets. According to the report, only 13 percent of Americans admitted to eating better while working from home, while 28 percent of adults reported a less healthy diet.

But all is not lost. There are plenty of ways to improve your eating habits at home and it doesn't have to take much effort or cost at all.

“For staples, we want to go through our meals for the day,” said Katherine Kaufman, an OSF HealthCare registered dietitian. “For breakfast you’re going to have toast or eggs and thinking about fruits and vegetables and different types of grains, so maybe you really like pasta but you’re burned out on it so you think about rice, quinoa. For meats, we’ll probably talk about meat shortages a little bit. But thinking about our variety of meats, seafood and thinking about where our fiber is going to come from so beans, whole grains and things like that.”

People who eat a well-balanced diet tend to be healthier with stronger immune systems and lower risk of chronic illnesses and infectious diseases. Dietitians recommend eating a variety of fresh and unprocessed foods every day to get the vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber, and proteins we need. Drink plenty of water and avoid overdoing it when it comes to sugar, fat and salt that can potentially lead to obesity, heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

“For fruits and vegetables, you always want to add those to what we are eating,” said Katherine Kaufman, an OSF HealthCare registered dietitian. “So if you feel the last few months you’ve been eating pizza every night or getting sandwiches and getting burned out, think about what else you can do with fruits and vegetables. So even if you make a pasta salad throw more vegetables in or if you bake put more fruit in when you make a cake that has fruit in it or a pie. Just something to keep you busy a little bit, too, and entertained because there’s not much we can do right now. Try new recipes like that is a way to add a little bit of nutrition but also a little fun as well.”

During the pandemic, finding some of the necessary staples to make a new recipe might be difficult. But if you find yourself scrambling for an egg or oil, for example, there are some fun alternative options.

“For oil and eggs you can often use apple sauce for oil usually half a cup for a recipe and if you do have some oil just a little bit to keep it as moist,” said Katherine Kaufman, an OSF HealthCare registered dietitian. “You can use ground flax seed as a replacement, I think it is two

tablespoons for a cup of water and then you let it sit for a few minutes and then that turns into a replacement for an egg. Fruit purees, so prune puree can be used for an oil substitute, really any type of fruit in a liquid form like a banana mashed form can be used as an oil replacement to keep it moist.”

Meat has been in short supply recently, so Kaufman recommends thinking outside the box. For example, consider making a meatless pizza or substituting ground beef in your pasta with diced carrots, onions and red pepper for taste. And switching out ground beef for lentils or black beans on your tacos is another creative way to enjoy the at-home version of Taco Tuesday.

Whatever you do, the key to controlling those unhealthy eating habits is to maintain consistency, especially if you are home all day long.

“Try to keep your routine,” said Katherine Kaufman, an OSF HealthCare registered dietitian. “If everyone is home keep a routine that we eat lunch at noon every day, we’re going to offer a snack at 3 p.m. every day just so we’re not grazing all day long and kids aren’t asking for a snack every hour. The idea is the kitchen is open, the kitchen is closed to keep their eating in line as well so they’re not eating all day. In boredom we tend to go towards food or the refrigerator so having a schedule can be helpful.” For more information on nutrition facts, visit www.osfhealthcare.org