

# HEALTHY OUTCOMES

## Is Social Distancing Still Important?

By Geisinger Wellness | May 2020

**Even though coronavirus cases are slowing, and stay-at-home orders are being lifted across the U.S., social (or physical) distancing practices are still important. Here's why.**

There's evidence suggesting that COVID-19 cases have "peaked" in the United States, leading many to believe we're through the worst part of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

But is it too soon to tell? Experts say, "yes."

### Are COVID-19 cases slowing?

As of right now, COVID-19 cases have declined — but mainly as a result of measures taken to "flatten the curve," or slow the spread of the virus.

Measures such as business and school closures, stay-at-home orders and social distancing have all helped to lessen the impact of the virus. And additional measures, like contact tracing programs, are identifying those who may have had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 to help prevent even further spread.

"While it's true that COVID-19 cases are slowing, there's no way to be sure they will continue to decline once communities start to reopen and stay-at-home orders are relaxed," says Dr. Alison Brodgerski, director of infectious diseases in Geisinger's northeast region. "Especially without an approved vaccine."

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The HCQU works with intellectual disabilities and behavioral health programs in Central PA to provide health care management services for adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities or Autism. Our goal is that all people living in PA, regardless of ability, receive the finest community services available – assuring that they are as healthy as possible and can fully participate in community life. The HCQU works to enhance access to community physical and mental health care through **FREE** education, public health outreach, advocacy and empowerment as well as to improve health care outcomes. Serving the following counties: Blair, Centre, Columbia/Montour/Snyder/Union, Huntingdon/Mifflin/Juniata, Lycoming/Clinton, Northumberland and Schuylkill.

# Here's Why Stressing About Quarantine Weight Gain is a Bad Thing

By Geisinger Wellness | May 2020

## Tips to keep your stress levels in check (and not worry about your weight).

Between quarantine baking and changes in the way we grocery shop, you may have heard jokes about gaining the “quarantine 15.” Jokes aside, this may be causing stress that isn’t beneficial to your overall health and well-being.

Over time, excess stress can lead to more serious health problems aside from gaining a few pounds, including high blood pressure, heart disease and depression. While worrying about gaining weight is normal, here are some tips to keep yourself in check (while also giving yourself a little wiggle room).

## Don't worry about dieting

Any restrictive diet, such as cutting carbs or fad dieting, will physically cause stress to your body. “In fact, fad diets are never a good idea unless you’re prescribed to eat a certain way by your doctor,” says Ashley Hashuga, CRNP in GI Nutrition at Geisinger. Fad diets are often a quick fix and can lead to weight gain once you stop following them.

Plus, our pandemic-inspired shopping habits may not necessarily support a strict diet. “Now, we’re shopping every two or three weeks – less than we’re used to – and we’re often buying what’s in the store that day. That won’t always line up with a perfectly healthy diet, and that’s ok,” says Ms. Hashuga.

Allow yourself to eat whatever is on-hand, focusing on whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds as much as possible. It’s all about balance, and that balance looks different to everyone.

Here are some tips for healthy eating without dieting:

- Plan to eat regular meals throughout the day.
- Eat more slowly, savor every bite and recognize when you’re full.
- Plan and prep your meals for the week as much as possible.
- Drink plenty of water – 64 to 70 ounces of water every day.

Remember not to compare yourself and what you’re eating to what you see on TV, social media or in the media. Those images are often unrealistic and professionally edited. Gaining weight or having a body that doesn’t match what you see on TV isn’t unhealthy, because your weight isn’t the only indicator of your overall health. It’s more important to manage your stress levels right now.

## Manage stress to prevent health problems

When we’re stressed, our bodies produce excess levels of cortisol. “Cortisol is a stress hormone that helps control your blood sugar levels and regulate your metabolism,” says Ms. Hashuga. “If your cortisol levels are continually elevated, it can lead to weight gain, among other health concerns.” These can include anxiety, depression, digestion issues, trouble sleeping and heart disease.

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## PPC MEETING

The June Central Region PPC Meeting scheduled for June 23, 2020, has been cancelled. The August meeting is scheduled for August 25, 2020 from 10 am to 12 noon. Meeting details will be forthcoming.



# Social Distancing...

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In fact, many states have reported a rise in cases just days after reopening and lifting stay-at-home orders.

So how can we reopen our communities, while avoiding a surge in COVID-19 cases? Cautiously. This means continuing to practice measures to keep the virus from spreading — like social distancing.

## Keep practicing social distancing

While you may be more than ready to see your extended family and friends and get back to normal, the pandemic is far from being over.

“We understand that it’s hard to be physically apart from your loved ones,” adds Dr. Brodginiski. “But since this virus mainly spreads from person-to-person, measures must be taken to help keep ourselves and others safe.”

One of the best ways to reduce the spread of the virus is by limiting contact and continuing to practice social distancing. Here’s a refresher:

- Stay at least 6 feet away from others
- Always wear a face mask when in public
- Avoid gathering in groups (small or large)
- Limit time spent in crowded places, like grocery stores

**And remember:** As we continue to keep our physical distance from one another, we can still stay connected and support each other. Here are ways to safely stay connected:

- Video chats
- Phone calls
- Text messaging
- Social media

- Video games
- Virtual game and movie nights
- Hiking and going for walks outdoors (while keeping your distance)

Staying connected can help us relieve some of the stress brought on by the pandemic. Need extra support? Find resources to support your mental health.

## Getting back to normal — safely

As we all begin to resume some of our normal activities, like shopping at local businesses or scheduling in-person doctor appointments, it’s important to be mindful.

“COVID-19 is still in our communities,” says Dr. Brodginiski. “So, we can’t forget to take preventive measures to avoid getting or spreading the virus.”

These preventive measures include:

- Keeping at least 6 feet of distance from others.
- Washing your hands, especially after being out in public. Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol works, too.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wearing a face mask when around others.
- Covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the crook of your elbow.
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently used surfaces in your home daily.
- Knowing the symptoms of COVID-19 and monitoring your health.

As this pandemic continues, your safety and well-being are our top priority. By continuing to follow preventive guidelines and measures, we can continue to slow the spread of the coronavirus, keeping ourselves and others safe. ■



# We've Got an App for That!

## COVID COACH

Because COVID impacts our work life and family/friend life, here's some "go to" helpful information.

In terms of interventions for the anxiety and depression existing in our COVID situations, what should psychiatrists, psychologists, and other clinicians be thinking about?

Right now, the best thing that we can do as mental health providers for people impacted by the trauma is provide crisis intervention (<https://www.medscape.com/view/article/928306>) for those saying they are a danger to themselves and others. That means providing coping strategies and support. It also means making sure people are taking breaks and taking care of themselves, taking that little bit of time off so that they can go back, fully recharge to their jobs, and really stay there.

As we move forward, it will be clearer whether people are going to naturally recover, which most people will. For those who are going to have ongoing problems with time, we need to be getting ready as a system and as a country for those long-term mental health issues that are going to be coming up. And when we say long-term, it means the next 1-3 months. We want to be providing preventive interventions, versions of prolonged exposure, and other things that have shown some help in preventing PTSD. Psychological first aid is helpful.

There's also an app called COVID Coach ([https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID\\_coach\\_app.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID_coach_app.asp)) that the National Center for PTSD has created. It features a lot of positive coping resources together in one source.

**COVID Coach is a free, easy-to-use mobile application created for everyone**, including Veterans and Servicemembers, to support self-care and overall mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It was developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2020. The app connects you to resources to help you cope with stress, stay healthy, stay connected, and navigate parenting, caregiving, and working at home while social distancing or sheltering in place. COVID Coach is not meant to replace professional care related to COVID-19 or mental health conditions, such as PTSD. ■



## Stressing About Quarantine Weight Gain is a Bad Thing...

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If you can work to keep your stress levels down, it will help to improve your overall health. Everyone has a different way to reduce stress. From taking baths to walking or baking, find what works best for you.

"Remember that whatever is causing your stress will eventually end and things will get back to normal," says Ms. Hashuga. Refocus your energy on something else to keep your mind as mentally sound as possible right now.

Ways to help manage stress include:

- Getting enough sleep each night.
- Practicing self-care, which can include any activity that brings you joy.
- Moving regularly, which can include yard work or walking.
- Practicing mindful exercises, such as deep breathing or meditation.

### Practice mindful eating

While stressing about gaining weight doesn't need to be a concern right now, consider eating mindfully be as it comes with many benefits.

"Mindful eating might mean something different to each of us," says Ms. Hashuga, "whether that's eating in-season foods, savoring each bite or simply eating until we're full. It's about enjoying every minute of what you're eating – no matter what it is."

If you're staying at home and only eating what you were able to buy the last time you went to the store, don't worry. We can't eat perfectly all the time. But you *can* pay attention to eating queues, like stopping when you're full, to help make the best out of what you have on hand.

"If you're going through a time of stress, you may find that you're eating a little more or just differently," says Ms. Hashuga. "This is completely normal because we tend to see food as comforting or something that gives us pleasure."

If you feel like eating and food are the only things getting you through your time of stress, consider talking to your support system to help you work through it. Whether that's through regular video calls with family or friends, or seeking help from a professional through a medical or telemedicine appointment (<https://www.geisinger.org/patient-care/telemedicine>). ■

## UNSCRAMBLE THE WORDS

(The words are taken from this month's articles and ads)

predgloon \_\_\_\_\_  
 clasio gantidnics \_\_\_\_\_  
 vigonnatia rab \_\_\_\_\_  
 fescour \_\_\_\_\_  
 sirvu \_\_\_\_\_  
 glanchlees \_\_\_\_\_  
 flimdunly \_\_\_\_\_  
 trainequan \_\_\_\_\_  
 deferri snabe \_\_\_\_\_  
 venosrinttine \_\_\_\_\_  
 cleanba \_\_\_\_\_  
 excamin \_\_\_\_\_  
 ginnisdifect \_\_\_\_\_  
 preeno \_\_\_\_\_  
 invageat \_\_\_\_\_

### ANSWERS TO WORD SCRAMBLE:

navigate  
 quarantine, refried beans, interventions, balance, Mexican, disinfecting, reopen,  
 prolonged, social distancing, navigation bar, refocus, virus, challenges, mindfully,

## INTERA NEW ONLINE COURSE AVAILABLE

# Coronavirus (COVID 19)

The Health Care Quality Unit (HCQU) offers educational online courses for anyone who is interested in learning more information on different health care issues. Each completed course allows you to receive 0.5 hour of credit towards your annual human services training requirement.

Visit

<http://www.geisinger.org/hcqu> and click on "Take an Online Course" located on the navigation bar on the left. Then click on the link "listing of the available online courses."



## AID in PA

AID in PA is a resource collection for Pennsylvanians in the autism and intellectual disability communities. A joint effort between ASERT (Autism Services, Education Resources, and Training) and the statewide HCQUs (Health Care Quality Units), this site is designed to connect individuals with disabilities, families, professionals, and community members with resources that can best serve them in emergency situations. Current resources focus on the ongoing COVID-19 crisis; however, this site can be adapted to other challenges facing the community.

<https://aidinpa.org/>

Do you have a favorite recipe?

You can submit it by sending to

[lgmurphy@geisinger.edu](mailto:lgmurphy@geisinger.edu)

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**Schuylkill Co.** – Brandi McIntyre RN, 570-214-1150 ext. 1001124029

# Cooking Corner

## Mexican Chicken

Submitted by Eileen Musgrave

This is a tasty, easy dish to put together: Preheat oven to 350°. Use an 8x8 baking dish (no greasing necessary). Layer ingredients below:

- 1½ cups of cooked, cut up chicken
- 1 can of cream of mushroom soup
- 1½ cups of broken up tortilla chips
- 1 can tomatoes
- 1½ cups grated Colby-Jack Cheese
- Green chopped onion sprinkled on top

Bake 35-40 min. until cheese starts to brown.

Serving Side Suggestions: **Refried Beans** – put beans in baking dish, top with extra cheese and bake alongside casserole above; **Mexicorn or Fiesta Corn** in a can. Serve over a bed of **shredded lettuce!**

