

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities

Eating Well During Stressful Times

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The COVID-19 pandemic can affect every area of our lives. Daily stress, lost income, and new schedules and responsibilities can limit time, money, and attention available for purchasing, preparing, and enjoying food. The tips below can help you prioritize your health during stressful times.

Prevent emotional eating: Emotional eating is misusing food to cope with negative feelings instead of satisfying true physical hunger. Because eating is a pleasure, it can be easy to eat excessively for a quick relief or distraction. Furthermore, many comfort foods are high in sugars and/or fats and can leave you feeling sluggish. When feeling tense, stop and listen to your body's physical sensations and ask yourself if you are truly hungry. When it is time to eat, serve yourself with a plate instead of straight from a container to manage portion sizes.

Beware of stress-causing foods: Avoid caffeine and sugar on hectic days. Caffeine in tea, coffee, and soda can cause panicked, jittery feelings. If you prefer to dress up plain water, try herbal tea, diluted juice, or adding slices of fruit. Sugar causes inflammation and a spike followed by a crash in blood sugar. Added sugar hides in a surprisingly high number of foods, so check food labels first.

Choose foods for energy: Meals combining fiber, protein, and unsaturated fats help you feel full and power through your day. Try to eat at least two of the three at each mealtime. When on the go, bring snacks with at least 5 grams of protein per serving, like one string cheese or serving of nuts, or snacks with at least 3 grams of fiber, like a banana or orange.

Make cooking and mealtime special: Establishing structure, routines, and time for relationships around food can be a relief from the uncertainty of the outside world. If possible, plan shopping trips and food preparation ahead of time and eat with family or friends. If you have spare time, try cooking a new recipe.



Manage time and money spent on food: If time or money is a challenge when cooking or food shopping, it is still possible to eat well. Pressure cookers and slow cookers adjust the cooking times to match your schedule. Some foods like cereal, granola, and yogurt require no preparation. Look for varieties of these foods that are low in added sugar to keep handy at home. If you enjoy pre-made frozen meals, choose items with as few food additives as possible. Canned and jarred foods are affordable, convenient, and can be kept in storage until needed. Look for fruits such as peaches, pears, and pineapple packed in juice or water and

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The Truth about Infused Water

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Why Do People Choose Infused Water?

Over the last few years, infusing water with fruit and vegetables has become a popular way to eliminate sugary, carbonated drinks, while also straying away from plain, boring water. With no added sugar and no calories, infused water is a flavorful way to increase water intake and stay hydrated.

Water intake is essential for human life because water maintains the balance of body fluids. The functions of these bodily fluids include digestion, absorption, circulation, transportation of nutrients, and maintenance of body temperature. Because your body loses water through breathing, sweating, and digestion, it is important to rehydrate by drinking fluids and eating foods that contain water. Bodies need to stay hydrated in order to maintain good health and avoid fatigue and headaches. Increasing water intake can result in healthier skin, alertness, improved digestion, and maintaining a healthy weight.

Infused water is one of the hottest wellness trends on social media, and manufacturers were quick to respond by manufacturing bottles that make it easier for consumers to infuse their favorite produce into their water. While there is an abundance of health and wellness claims that encourage consumers to purchase infuser water bottles and drink infused water, there is less evidence to support claims about weight loss and increased vitamins and minerals in infused water. To ensure their products are sold, most companies make sure to state that infused water is healthy and aids in weight loss right on the packaging. Though this is true, they failed to delve into the scientific facts on the trend and warn consumers on the safety hazards.



Research has found that improper care of fruits and lack of information of safety precautions can lead to bacterial growth and foodborne illness. According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), fresh-cut fruit is considered potentially hazardous. When fruit and vegetables are fresh-squeezed or used raw, bacteria from the produce can get into your juice, including your infused water. With this in mind, it is important to handle fresh fruit safely when making infused water. To avoid bacteria growth and assure that you are handling your fruit safely, it is crucial to follow these tips:

- It starts at the supermarket: check your produce for bruising or damage
- Make sure you have clean hands prior to handling the produce; wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before infusion
 - If time permits, it is recommended to wash your produce in a water and vinegar mixture to eliminate more bacteria
 - Allow your produce to sit in a bath of $\frac{3}{4}$ water and $\frac{1}{4}$ vinegar for 5-10 minutes, then wash gently under cool water
- Store infused water at 40 °F or below in a sealed pitcher
- If you take it on the go, make sure you drink it within four hours to prevent bacteria growth. This is due to the fact that it is now being stored at room temperature.
- For better quality, drain fruit and vegetable solids and remove from infused water within 24 hours and refrigerate the water for up to three days. The produce can be stored in a tightly sealed container for up to six days, however, be sure to examine it for spoilage
 - Be sure to avoid cross contamination
 - Use a clean cutting board and utensils
 - In the supermarket, bag produce separately from raw meat, poultry, or seafood
 - Avoid refilling the same pitcher when starting a new batch

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When Life Seems Out of Control, Control What You Can

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COVID-19 reached American soil months ago and, for many people, mental and/or physical fatigue are palpable. Sheltering in place has gotten very “old” and weeks with a reduced (or no) income have thrown the finances of millions of households into a tailspin. Studies show that prolonged “paycheck to paycheck” living can sap mental bandwidth and stress mental health to the point that people are simply not fully functioning.

Throw in the fact that the duration, severity, and lethality of COVID-19 are still unknown. Further, add the consensus from numerous observers that many things in life will be different, at least until we get to “the other side” (whenever that is) and, perhaps, much longer. Examples include: more working from home, new travel procedures, crowd control measures, and fewer people making advance plans that require big deposits.

What to do? The only thing that we can do. Create some semblance of a routine and focus on things that we can control. Below are nine small steps to navigate change, loss, and uncertainty in this turbulent time:

- **Marshall Resources** - Look for sources of monetary support and human services in your community, if needed. Examples include food pantries, job training programs, and utility assistance. For information about local resources, call 211 or visit www.211.org or reach out to local human services agencies.
- **Create a Spending Plan (Budget)** - Make your best estimate of current income and expenses and consider various ways to close the gap. For example, money saved by getting free food at a food pantry or by spending less on child care, gas, and travel preserves scarce income for rent or utility payments.
- **Develop a Daily Schedule** - Plan out your days to avoid feeling “unmoored” from normal routines. Include some type of physical activity every day. The Center for Financial Social Work has a useful [e-book](https://financialsocialwork.com/downloads/financial-reality-coping-ebook) with helpful scheduling worksheets: <https://financialsocialwork.com/downloads/financial-reality-coping-ebook>.
- **Increase Your Financial Literacy** - Set a goal to learn something new about personal finance every day. Financial knowledge helps build financial preparedness, which can increase resilience in tough times. Rutgers Cooperative Extension has useful worksheets, videos, and other resources: <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/money/>.
- **Seize Control of Controllable Things** - Draw a table with three columns: Control, Adapt, and Monitor. List events and actions you have control over in column 1, followed by those you can adapt to, and those you should pay attention to, in columns 2 and 3. “Controllable” items include scheduling daily routines, self-care activities, home organization tasks, and new spending patterns.
- **Protect Your Credit** - Contact your creditors before you are late with a payment and discuss options for leniency and a payment plan. Confirm all agreements with creditors in writing with a follow-up letter or e-mail. On-time payment is a key factor in credit scoring so make sure your credit history is not damaged.
- **Upskill Yourself** - Use newly found free time to prepare yourself for re-employment with your current employer or elsewhere. Focus on gaps in your skill set and making yourself as marketable as possible with a college degree, certification program credentials, new technology skills, and other employer-valued traits.
- **Be Grateful, Helpful, and Creative** - List five things that you are grateful for every day. Doing this can help foster optimism. Also find ways to support others. It will help other people cope with COVID-19 and make you feel good also. In addition, develop creative COVID-19 work-arounds. Zoom parties, COVID-19 themed songs and videos, artistic face masks, and drive-by graduations and parades are just a few recent examples.
- **Take Deep Breaths** - Acknowledge that you may be feeling confused and overwhelmed right now. Big parts of your life have been turned upside down. Many people are not balancing work and family. They are balancing work with family. You are not alone. Many others are feeling the same way. Health experts often recommend deep breathing as a way to lower stress. [Try it](#) and see if it helps.



Eat What You Grow – Beets and Turnips

Christine Zellers, MPP, FCHS Educator, Cape May County



In the cooler months, root vegetables such as beets and turnips are hearty in New Jersey. Both offer vitamins, minerals and nutrients that provide needed health benefits during the fall and winter months. Roasted, raw or pickled, beets and turnips are tasty and filling during the winter months and supply a protective immunity boost during cold and flu season.



Every part of a beet can be consumed including roots, stem and leaves which boasts a bounty of nutritious benefits. Additionally, beets come in various colors such as yellow,

pink, white and dark purple and the beautiful colors give them powerful nutrients to fight chronic disease. When preparing beets, think about how to use the entire plant. The root can be roasted or eaten raw by shredding it onto salads or soups. The stem is often prepared like swiss chard or bok choy and can be sautéed with the leaves of the beets and some garlic. The leaves themselves are delicious as a tart uncooked salad and pair well with a strong, flavorful dressing and sharp cheese. Pickled beets are a preserving favorite and should be canned by hot packing the beets. The leaves of beets as well as turnips can be preserved by blanching and freezing them. Beets are a good source of magnesium which helps control blood sugar levels, muscle development and blood pressure while the potassium in beets support good heart health. Beets provide good iron intake that helps transport oxygen in the red blood cells of our body. The vitamin C in beets supports a healthy immune system. Beets provide benefits for the body's overall function and contribute greatly to a healthy lifestyle. Enjoy beets as the winter months approach to stay healthy this winter.



Much like beets, turnips are a good addition to a fall or winter menu when searching for versatile veggies. Turnips can be eaten raw or cooked and the roots and leaves are edible. When cooking turnips,

try using them as a substitute for mashed potatoes as their flavor is similar to a potato. Raw, they make a nice substitute for cabbage in a slaw or shredded as a salad topping. If the greens are wilted, soaking them in cold water for a few minutes will bring turnip greens as well as beet greens back to a crispy edible dish. Preserving turnips has similar recommendations to beets with hot

packing when pickling. Turnip greens can be blanched and then frozen. Turnips are a healthy, nutrient dense vegetable choice, like beets and turnip greens contain folate which helps with normal tissue growth and assists with cell functions. Folate is especially important for pregnant women as it helps with fetal development during pregnancy. Turnip greens are full of vitamin K and vitamin A. Vitamin K is essential for blood clotting and helps prevent excessive bleeding. Vitamin A is great for eye, skin, and lung health. Additionally, turnips contain vitamin C and calcium making this root veggie a filling and worthwhile choice as a cool weather vegetable.

Both beets and turnips were featured in the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County's series Eat What You Grow. This series was conducted virtually and was a collaboration between RCE's Family and Community Health Sciences and Agriculture and Natural Resources Departments. All three of these informational sessions on growing, preparing, and preserving vegetables at home can be viewed at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County's website at: <https://capemay.njaes.rutgers.edu/>.

ROASTED BEET SALAD WITH FETA:

- 5-6 Beets
- 2 Tablespoons of Olive Oil
- 1/2 red onion, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
- 3/4 cup, crumbled feta cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- 1) To roast beets, preheat oven to 400°.
- 2) Wash beets and cut/remove leaves and stems.
- 3) Cut piece of aluminum foil, large enough to hold beets. Toss beets with olive oil to coat on foil, fold sides around beets to create a packet. Roast in oven for 1 - 1 1/2 hours, depending on the size of the beets, until tender.
- 4) Remove from oven and open packet, allowing them to cool.
- 5) When cool enough to handle, peel skins and cut into 1/2" pieces. Add red onion, salt and pepper, and refrigerate until cold.
- 6) Before serving, add crumbled feta to beets and onions. Toss gently together.



The Lowdown on Legumes

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COVID-19 has affected millions of people in various ways. From social distancing to job uncertainty, the pandemic has impacted everyday life. With the stay-at-home order put into place in mid-March, there has been an increase in consumer demand for food and other retail goods and a decrease in supply for those goods. In April, there was the sharpest increase in grocery prices in roughly 50 years, with the greatest price increase for meat, poultry, fish, and eggs. From March to April, the prices of these foods increased by 4.3 percent; from June 2019 to June 2020, the price of meat, poultry, fish, and eggs in total has increased by nearly 350 percent.

The price of plant-based sources of protein, however, has stayed relatively the same. In 2019, the average price of canned beans was \$1.00, and the average price of dried beans was \$1.32. Today, the average price of canned beans is still \$1.00, and the average price of dried beans is \$1.42. In these unprecedented times, you might be looking for ways to stay within your grocery budget without compromising the nutritional quality of the food you buy. Legumes are an inexpensive alternative to meat, poultry, fish, and eggs and pack just as much protein and other nutrients as those items.

Legumes are seeds from the plant of the Leguminosae or Fabaceae family and include beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts. These shelf-stable foods are rich in protein, fiber, complex carbohydrates, B vitamins, iron, zinc, magnesium, and potassium. Legumes are also low in fat, especially saturated fat making them an ideal meat substitute. One cup of lentils contains 18 grams of protein and 16 grams of dietary fiber. One cup of garbanzo beans contains 15 grams of protein and 13 grams of dietary fiber. The American Heart Association recommends eating 5 servings of legumes a week. Research shows that one serving of cooked beans, ½ cup, helps lower LDL cholesterol or “bad” cholesterol. In addition, four servings of beans and legumes a week can reduce the risk of heart disease and colon polyps.

From adding to a salad to mashing into a dip, legumes can be eaten in a variety of ways. Different types of legumes work best in certain recipes, as seen below:

- **Adzuki beans:** soups and bean pastes
- **Black-eyed peas:** salads, casseroles, burgers, and fritters
- **Edamame:** snack, salads, and rice dishes
- **Garbanzo beans:** hummus, salads, and soups
- **Lentils:** soups, stews, and rice dishes



Black-eyed Pea, Tomato and Egg Salad

Ingredients

- ½ cup no-salt-added black-eyed peas, cooked
- ½ cup chopped tomatoes
- 1 hard-boiled egg, chopped
- 2 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp. reduced-fat feta cheese



Instructions

- 1) Mix all ingredients and enjoy!

Cooking tips for legumes include the following:

- ✓ **Canned legumes tend to have a lot of salt for preservative purposes**, so be sure to rinse them thoroughly before use. Research shows that rinsing and draining canned legumes can reduce sodium by 36-41 percent!
- ✓ **Dried beans and legumes**, with the exception of lentils, split peas, and black-eyed peas, need to be soaked for at least 8 hours before use. Wash dried beans and legumes before soaking.
- ✓ **To reduce the gas factor**, do not cook the beans in the same water they are soaked in.
- ✓ **When cooking legumes**, slowly simmer until tender (at least 45 minutes).

The virus’s impact on the food retail industry is evident with the overall increase in food prices. This has caused many people to budget their expenses. Even though the price of food has changed, the quality of food you eat does not have to change. On your next grocery store visit, or before your next grocery delivery, choose legumes! Since they are shelf-stable, you do not have to worry about food waste, and you get to stretch your dollar!

Why is “Winter” Squash So Healthy?

Karen Ensle, EdD, RDN, FAND, CFCS, FCHS Educator, Union County



Fall is in the air. The temperatures are cooler and the trees are vibrant colors of orange, yellow, and bright red. Along with the colder weather and autumn colors come a host of “winter” vegetables that are perfect for making “comfort foods” that are great tasting and healthy. Winter squash is one of our favorites.

Winter squash comes in a variety of types and flavors, and are loaded with antioxidants, fiber and essential vitamins and minerals. Winter squash can be used as a main course or a side dish. According to the American Institute of Cancer Research, carotenoids in winter squash - beta-carotene and alpha-carotene - are important for maintaining healthy cells and strengthening the immune system.

Generally, a diet rich in vegetables and fruits can lower blood pressure, reduce risk of heart disease and stroke, prevent some types of cancer, lower risk of eye and digestive problems, and have a positive effect upon blood sugar which can help keep appetite in check. And while several nutrients in squash like the carotenoids, vitamin C, polysaccharide fibers, and minerals such as potassium and magnesium have been researched individually for their role in health and chronic disease prevention, there is a lack of epidemiological studies or controlled trials looking at specific health benefits of winter squash.

One popular type of winter squash is **butternut squash** which is easy to prepare and has a high nutrient content and nutty mild flavor. It has plenty of fiber which aides your body in digestive health and helps in lowering your blood cholesterol and stabilizing your blood glucose levels. It helps to suppress your appetite and is also rich in carotenoids including the antioxidant beta-carotene, the precursor to vitamin A, which benefits your skin and eyes. Its high mineral content, also helps your heart beat normally.



Butternut

Acorn squash is another nutrient-dense sweet and nutty tasting winter squash with a texture similar to sweet potatoes and butternut squash. It is dark green and ribbed, and is rich in vitamin A, a powerful antioxidant that fights free radicals and reduces the risk of cancerous cell growth according to Aune et al. Acorn squash has a high fiber content, which has been linked to a decreased risk of diabetes, stroke and obesity. Its vitamin C content acts as an immune booster and simultaneously reduces the risk of developing or worsening symptoms of hypertension. When researchers Aune D, Keum N, Giovannucci E, et al. combined findings from the Harvard studies with several other long-term studies in the U.S. and Europe, and looked at coronary heart disease and stroke separately, they found a similar protective effect: Individuals who ate more than 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day had roughly a 20% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, compared with individuals who ate less than 3 servings per day.



Acorn

Another healthy winter squash is **spaghetti squash**. This stringy, yellow squash can be used in place of spaghetti noodles, creating a cleaner, more nutrient-dense meal than traditional pasta. It is also full of potassium, which aids in cardiovascular health by lowering blood pressure when eaten frequently. The folate (vitamin B6) in these nutritious “noodles” strengthens the walls of your blood vessels, which helps to improve blood circulation. Spaghetti squash also contains omega fatty acids which add to its anti-inflammatory benefits.



Spaghetti

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Kabocha squash is similar to butternut squash, but it has a bright orange flesh when its green skin is broken. Similar in taste but with fewer calories and carbohydrates, kabocha squash also contains iron and fiber. Unlike its squash cousins, the skin of this winter squash is edible.

Hubbard squash is an uncommon winter variety, but this squash is a sweet, orange variety that is rich in manganese, which is necessary for the process of blood metabolism and blood sugar regulation.



Kabocha

Winter squash has a much longer storage life than summer squash. Depending upon the variety and it can be stored one week to six months. These squash should be kept away from direct exposure to light and should not be subject to extreme heat or cold. Once it is cut, cover the pieces of winter squash in plastic wrap and store them in the refrigerator where they will keep for one or two days.

Seeds from winter squash make a great snack food. Scoop the pulp and seeds from inside the squash and separate out the seeds. Place them in a single layer on a cookie sheet and lightly roast them in your conventional oven at 160-170°F for 15-20 minutes for a delicious flavor.

A favorite way to prepare winter squash is to steam it. Cut the squash in 1-inch cubes and steam for 7 minutes. You can also bake your squash or create a spectacular winter squash soup for a cold afternoon. Golden squash soup anyone?

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vegetables packed without salt. Stock your pantry with canned and boxed soup. Soup is available in many varieties and can be quickly heated for a filling meal.



Bottom line: Rising above life’s challenges can be easier when eating wholesome foods. With careful planning, it is possible to be healthy when working with limited resources.

Resources:

Food shopping on a budget: <https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/smart-shopping/shop-healthy-on-a-budget>

Managing overeating: <https://www.umms.org/coronavirus/what-to-know/managing-medical-conditions/healthy-habits/healthy-eating>

Managing stress with healthy eating habits: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/eating-during-covid-19-improve-your-mood-and-lower-stress-2020040719409>

Snack Ideas: <http://www.eatright.org/-/media/eatright%20files/nationalnutritionmonth/handoutsandtipsheets/nutritiontipsheets/25healthysnacksideas.ashx>

