

Re-Establishing Healthy Routines and Habits in the New Normal

Source: Lifeworks

Following a big disruption of any kind – a house move, a new baby, a change in job – it’s often difficult to re-establish routines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many have found that the majority of their routines have been turned upside down. You might find the pandemic has touched all parts of your life, including when, where, and how you exercise, what you cook and eat, how you manage your finances, and how you spend your leisure and relaxation time.

As we settle into a “new normal” – acclimatizing to the reality of the pandemic and trying to regain a sense of what normal looks like now – many will be thinking about how to find new ways to look after their health. Here are some top tips for working out new routines to get on top of your health goals.

Exercise. With many people still working from home, it can be much harder to fit exercise into your day. If you would usually use your commute as a chance to exercise, or if you go for a run around the park at lunchtime, you may need to intentionally re-create those opportunities in your day. For example:

- Go for a morning “commute” before you start work. A quick walk around the block, a run, or a morning bike ride will give you energy and help you focus before you begin work for the day.
- Do a YouTube workout during your lunch break or after work.
- Sign up for an outdoor or online workout class and schedule it into your calendar – for example, yoga, Pilates, Zumba, high-intensity impact training (HIIT), or dance.

If child care is an issue for your exercise schedule, you may want to brainstorm ways to exercise with the kids. They may need extra opportunities to stay active too, especially if school is closed. Some ways to do this include:

- going for a walk or run with a running stroller
- playing a family game of catch or Frisbee in the park
- going for a family bike ride or hike (using a bike seat or carrier for younger kids)
- taking older children sledding, skating, or skiing
- undertaking the Couch to 5K program together

Diet. In times of stress, it’s easy to turn to sweet, oily, and high-carbohydrate foods for a short-term pleasure boost. However, over a prolonged period of time, these kinds of foods can be detrimental to your physical and mental health, so it’s important to re-establish a healthy eating routine. Here are some easy switches to help get back into a healthy eating pattern:

- Keep frozen veggies (frozen spinach, kale, peas, and carrots) on hand to throw into pasta sauce, curries, and soups.
- Substitute mashed potato with roasted vegetables, or replace chips with a side salad.
- Take meat out of a few dishes and replace it with lentils, mushrooms, or beans.
- Start the day with a bowl of fresh fruit, plain yogurt, and muesli.
- Snack on nuts and dried fruit instead of biscuits, chocolate bars, or crisps.
- Replace dessert with fruit.
- Grill or bake with a small amount of oil instead of frying.
- Bulk cook and plan out meals and snacks so that you don't have to make a decision when you're hungry.
- Cook instead of getting takeaway, delivery, or frozen meals.
- Choose wholegrain breads, wraps, couscous, and pastas, and brown rice.
- Use a cooking oil spray to keep your oil consumption to a minimum.

Enlist your whole household to help with the cooking, washing up, planning, and shopping so you're not pursuing your goals alone.

Financial wellbeing. With the economy contracting as a result of the pandemic, it's a time of financial stress for many. Here are some healthy finance routines that you may want to build to shield you from the economic impact:

- monthly review of your budget to check where you're spending unnecessarily
- planning purchases ahead of time and researching the best deals instead of impulse buying
- checking your bank balance regularly
- saving towards a goal, even if it's small
- building or replenishing your emergency fund
- contributing to your pension, even if it's a small amount

Self-care. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stressful time: people are worrying about their loved ones, the economy, their own health, and their caring duties, and finding it hard to find time to switch off. It's hard to turn off the news or put down the news apps, however, it's important to carve out some time to take care of yourself.

Diet and exercise are a part of self-care, but so are things like getting enough sleep, taking time to unwind and relax, and planning time for social interactions. Here are some tips for getting into a good self-care routine in "the new normal":

PEOPLE RESOURCES

- Create boundaries between work and personal time by having an “end of work” ritual.
- Put your phone away before going to bed.
- Establish a bedtime routine.
- Plan time to read, meditate, garden, or do other calming, screen-free activities.
- Spend time investing in friendships, whether that’s by video call, voice notes, messages, physically distant meet-ups, or handwritten notes.