

Support your physical and mental wellbeing with healthy eating

We are living during difficult times because of the coronavirus pandemic. Those challenges can affect us both physically and emotionally. It's hard to keep the same routine when you have to physically distance from others, especially if you're at higher risk of getting really sick from the virus. That makes preparing meals a special challenge. Here are some tips that can support you and your household both physically and mentally:

- Do your best to eat nourishing meals, like those rich in fruits and vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains. Those foods can help keep your body and mind healthy during stressful times.
- Cut down on foods that can ramp up anxiety, such as sugar, caffeine, and alcohol.
- It's important to enjoy small treats, but avoid going overboard. Try to limit excessive consumption of sugar, caffeine, and alcohol. Overindulging can lead to increased anxiety or sluggishness.
- Feeling the urge to "stress snack"? Acknowledge your cravings, then take two or three deep breaths and ask yourself if you're really hungry or just passing the time.
- Having daily schedules and routines can ease anxieties and help you stay grounded. This applies to meals, too! Try to eat at regular meal times and avoid snacking in between.
- If you're staying at home with other people, try to eat at least one meal together each day. It can help dampen feelings of isolation, and help you practice mindful eating. Cooking together can also help you connect with others and ease the stress.

Safe grocery shopping

You can help slow the spread of the coronavirus, even while you're grocery shopping. By following a few basic guidelines, you can shop safely and efficiently, protecting yourself and

others. The key is to plan ahead, limit your exposure to the virus, and buy only what you need—there's more than enough food available if shoppers don't hoard.

Just follow these basic tips:

- Think ahead to limit your time in the store. Make a plan for meals and snacks for one or more weeks. Be flexible in case an item is temporarily out of stock – there might be a substitute.
- Include healthy foods on your shopping list that have longer shelf-life. Those items can include carrots, turnips, potatoes, yams, beets, onions, squash, cabbage, apples, melons, oranges, grapefruit, lemons, and limes, as well as frozen fruits and vegetables.
- Limit exposure by sending only one member of the household to shop. Do not bring along additional members, if possible.
- Wear a cloth face covering when shopping. Also, many stores have cleaning stations to sanitize your shopping carts and hands. Use them if they are available. Don't forget to wash your hands after leaving the store and after putting away the groceries.
- Maintain at least 6 feet from other shoppers and grocery store staff as much as possible while shopping.
- Touch only what you plan to purchase.
- Do not use soap, detergent, or sanitizers to clean produce. They can get into the food and make it unsafe to eat.

Resources to help you afford food

Many people living in Minnesota face challenges to get safe, affordable, healthy food. That challenge is tougher because of the coronavirus pandemic. If you're having a hard time affording food, or even if you might, there's assistance now, before you run out of food.

The following resources are available to help you:

- [COVID-19 emergency food support - Minnesota Department of Human Services](#)
- Visit the [Minnesota Food HelpLine](#) or call 1-888-711-1151.
- Counties and tribal human services agencies can help people apply for SNAP. Applicants can also go to www.applymn.dhs.mn.gov.
- Hunger Solutions - Winning Minnesota's Food Fight
 - Enter your location on Hunger Solution's "Find Help" tool to get directed to a food shelf or meal program. <http://www.hungersolutions.org/find-help/>
 - Hunger Solutions also has a map showing places that offer free or discounted meals for children, including schools and restaurants. Hunger Solutions Meals for Kids site: <http://www.hungersolutions.org/2020/03/16/meals-for-kids-during-covid-19-closings/>

Healthy eating for the whole family

Social distancing guidelines and virtual learning have meant big shifts in family routines, and that may include how you feed your family. Good food is fuel, not only for the body but also for the brain. That's especially true for younger and school-aged children. Preparing a healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day may seem overwhelming, but taking it one step at a time, and focusing on progress--not perfection--can help.

Follow these tips to help your family set a healthy eating routine:

- If possible, set up times for household "to-do's," including meals and snacks, time for physical activity, school, free time, and regular bed-times.
- Try to plan out your meals and snacks before you go to the grocery store. That helps you limit your trips while making sure you have the right foods for you and your family to eat a balanced diet.

- Ensure healthy, appealing snacks are available and visible, such as a bowl of fruit or carrots. Stock up on nutrient-rich snacks like dried fruits and nuts, cheese, boiled eggs, yogurt, chopped veggies, and hummus.
- Involve kids in meal planning and cooking. Involving children in simple tasks like reading recipes, measuring, and learning about fruits and vegetables. That can be a part of their “distance learning” in reading, math, and science!
- There are lots of online healthy lunch recipes for kids. Involve them in choosing and creating those lunches. Try this website from the University of Minnesota Extension for recipe ideas and cooking tips: <https://reallifegoodfood.umn.edu/>
- Serve milk or water, and avoid sugary drinks. If you give your kids juice, limit it to one small glass of 100% fruit juice a day.
- Aim for at least 60 minutes of active play during the “school” day, and if possible, spend time outside each day, while practicing social distancing guidelines.
- Try to do your best to be a role model for healthy eating.
- If you’re struggling to afford groceries, there are Minnesota-based resources available to you. Learn more about [resources to help you afford food](#).

Breastfeeding and COVID-19 guidance

Breastfeeding is one of the most important things you can do for the long-term health of your baby. That’s because it’s the best source of nutrition for most infants. However, it’s also important to use caution when breastfeeding children during the coronavirus pandemic. Taking a few cautionary steps, similar to the steps recommended for reducing personal exposure to the coronavirus, can help to keep your baby healthy while breastfeeding.

Staying safe while shopping at farmers markets

Minnesota's farmers markets are a good source of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Shopping at a farmers market is similar to safely shopping at a grocery store. Think about the following tips:

- Stay home if you are feeling sick.
- Follow social distancing guidelines, keeping 6 feet between you and others.
- Wear a face mask to help protect those around you.
- If possible, have only one family member go into the market to help reduce your family's exposure.
- Wash your hands and sanitize them frequently. Many farmers markets have cleaning stations—it's a good idea to take advantage of them.
- Do not touch the produce or goods until they are handed to you by the vendor.
- Bring smaller bills to reduce the money changing hands.
- Be patient. The purchasing time may take a little longer.
- Check market requirements on reusable bags. If they're allowed, machine wash them between each shopping trip.
- Some markets are offering pre-ordering and curbside pickup. Check out your market's website to learn what options they offer.
- Follow any instructions and signage posted at your market.

Keeping gardening fun and safe

Gardening can be a fun, relaxing activity that can help reduce stress while producing healthy food. For safe ways to garden during the outbreak, consider the following tips:

- In the same way you buy groceries, plan your trip to the garden store in advance, to help limit your time at the store.
- If possible, have only one family member go to the garden store to help reduce exposure.

- Follow social distancing guidelines while shopping at the garden store, keeping 6 feet between you and others.
- Wear a face mask to help protect those around you.
- If you do not want to enter a garden store, contact them to see if it is possible to place your order online or over the telephone. You could also consider buying plants or seeds online.

If you garden in a community space, follow these practices to stay healthy:

- Never enter community gardens if you are feeling sick.
- Maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet from other people within the garden.
- Do not hold community work days, celebrations, or other events that encourage gatherings at the community garden.
- If you use shared tools, make sure they're sanitized regularly.
- Wash your hands often—at least before and after visiting the garden, and at the garden if a sanitation station is available.
- Bring along your face mask just in case it's hard to maintain effective social distancing.