

# Health and Wellness:

Diet, exercise,  
and mindfulness  
during COVID-19

UCSF

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Our team at UCSF studies the role of diet and exercise in cancer survival.  
We work to:

- Understand what lifestyle behaviors increase risk of worse cancer outcomes
- Develop and test diet and exercise programs using rigorous science
- Create guidelines and resources for cancer patients and survivors

For information about our studies, please see <https://urology.ucsf.edu/lifestyle> for urology studies and <http://cancer.ucsf.edu/gi/survivorship-research> for gastrointestinal cancer studies.

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Physical activity and healthy eating are essential parts of how we take care of ourselves. Being active and eating well supports emotional and physical well-being and improves energy and immune function. It may feel hard to maintain regular physical activity such as exercise and healthy eating habits right now. It may be hard to find safe places to be active, and you may even feel trapped or isolated in your home. During the pandemic, you may be separated from family and friends and feeling a greater sense of worry, anxiousness, or loneliness. We acknowledge these stressors, struggles, and feelings and want to support you through this time. This guide will provide tips to help you establish new routines during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond for your mind, body, and spirit.

Regular exercise can result in less fatigue, reduced depression and anxiety, and better sleep. Being physically active releases chemicals in the brain called endorphins, which boost mood and elevate energy.

Before you begin, always make sure you consider the following steps to stay safe:



- Talk with your doctor or health professional first.
- Eat a small snack an hour before exercise.
- Drink plenty of water before, during, and after exercise.
- Warm up and cool down before and after exercise.
- Invite a workout buddy or have a phone nearby if alone.

Here are 3 strategies to help you be more active:

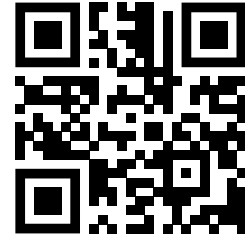
- Find a workout buddy (or buddies!).
- Create routines for both indoor and outdoor exercise and use what you have at home.
- Plan ahead!

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## WORKOUT PARTNERS

When exercising with others in person during the pandemic, always do it outside, wear a mask, and maintain social distance (6 feet or more).

- Invite someone – a family member, friend, neighbor – to exercise with you (as allowed by state and local government orders). See <https://covid19.ca.gov/>
- Take a picture of this QR bar code using your smart phone to access the latest guidelines!
- Whether you exercise in person or join each other by video or phone, having a friend can help motivate you and hold you accountable in attaining your goals. You can also check in with each other about your workouts by text or phone call.
- You don't need to be at the same level – someone who already has an exercise routine can help you develop your own or vice versa!



## HAVE AN INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PLAN

If you can, exercise outside.

But circumstances don't always allow it, so have options ready:

- Inside, you can perform bodyweight circuits or minimal equipment programs (e.g., resistance bands, wall-sits or push-ups, etc). Bodyweight movements require no equipment and little space, but can provide a full-body workout!
- Ask friends and family to join you and use the internet and social media to get ideas for what types of exercise you might be interested in that will fit your needs and goals.



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## USE HOUSEHOLD ITEMS



- Wear a backpack to add resistance to different bodyweight exercises (squats, lunges, push-ups, etc.) if needed.
- Use a bed for dips or incline/decline push-ups.
- Cans or water bottles can be used as light dumbbells.
- Milk or detergent containers can be used as medium-weight dumbbells or kettlebells.
- Lift flour, rice, or dog food bags for heavier loads.
- Don't forget your stairs or steps on/off a porch!

## PLAN AHEAD



- Set aside time to be active daily.
- Use a planner app or calendar to set time and reminders.
- Make a plan for what you will do each day.
- Be flexible – have an indoor and outdoor option for each session.
- If you are attending a lot of Zoom meetings or phone calls, pick one each day that you can attend or join while you go for a walk (i.e., off video).

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## RESOURCES

- Many free programs are available online with video demonstrations. Search on Google, YouTube, Instagram, etc.
- Use <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity> and <https://health.gov/moveyourway> for exercise tools, videos and fact sheets.
- Check out the SilverSneakers program at <https://tools.silversneakers.com/>, available at no cost for adults 65+ through select Medicare plans.
- The many options can feel overwhelming – ask friends and family for suggestions.

### How much activity do adults need?

**Adults need a mix of physical activity to stay healthy.**

**Moderate-intensity aerobic activity\***  
Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts.

at least  
**150 minutes a week**

AND


**Muscle-strengthening activity**  
Do activities that make your muscles work harder than usual.

at least  
**2 days a week**

\*If you prefer vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like running), aim for at least **75 minutes a week**.

If that's more than you can do right now, **do what you can**. Even 5 minutes of physical activity has real health benefits.

Walk. Run. Dance. Play. **What's your move?**



### Activity Planner

**Ready to get more active this week?**

Use this planner to set goals, choose activities you want to do, and get tips to help you stay motivated. When you're done, print your plan to track activity throughout the week.

**Adults need a mix of activity to be healthy:**

150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity

AND

2 days of muscle-strengthening activity

Why these goals? [Learn more about the guidelines.](#)

So aim for that mix in your weekly plan!

**Make your activity plan**

**Source:** Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Website links appear below.

Current guidelines can be found here:

<https://health.gov/our-work/physical-activity/current-guidelines>

Ready to get more active this week? Go to

<https://health.gov/moveyourway/activity-planner> to create a plan!

# HEALTHY EATING

Here are some strategies to help you stick to a healthy diet:

- Find a routine that works for you.
- Eat more plant foods. Try dried beans.
- Add nutrient-dense foods (foods with an abundance of nutrients but are low in calories). See examples, pg. 9.
- Make smart beverage choices.



## ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Stick to a regular eating schedule during the day.

- Our daily routines have changed, which may change the timing and frequency of your meals.
- A mealtime routine can provide structure to your day and reduce mindless or stress eating.



## EAT PLANT-BASED FOODS

Base your diet on plant-based foods.

- Vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains, nuts, and seeds provide immune-boosting nutrients and dietary fiber.
- Incorporate variety – try new things, but it's also ok to have your go-to produce items!
- Explore frozen food options since there is little difference in nutrients contained in fresh vs. frozen items. Make sure to choose frozen items that don't have added salt or sugar.
- Canned items can also be a good choice. Look for no (or low) added salt or sugar and rinse well before using.



# HEALTHY EATING

## TRY DRIED BEANS

- Dried beans are inexpensive, have no additives, and better texture and flavor!
- Cook a large batch and freeze leftovers in single servings.
- Beans can be a main dish, side dish, or add to soups, stews, wraps, or salads!
- Here's an example of a recipe to get you started:  
<https://www.bonappetit.com/story/how-to-cook-dried-beans>



## ADD NUTRIENT-DENSE FOODS

- Examples include leafy greens such as spinach, kale, and broccoli; whole grains such as quinoa and barley; fruits such as blueberries and strawberries; oily fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon and sardines; lean meats; and vegetables such as mushrooms, sweet potatoes, and bell peppers.
- Sprinkle flaxseed meal or chia seeds into oatmeal for heart-healthy omega-3 fats.
- Add nutritional yeast to bean soup, cottage cheese, or popcorn (air or oil popped) to increase B vitamins.
- Add herbs and spices to make food tastier with less salt/sugar. Dried rosemary, basil, garlic powder, turmeric, cinnamon, and ginger have as much, or more, beneficial plant compounds as fresh!



## MAKE SMART BEVERAGE CHOICES

- Drink plenty of water.
- Be mindful about alcohol and caffeine – limit intake to help manage anxiety and promote better sleep.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages like regular soda (not sugar-free), fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened waters, and coffee and tea beverages with added sugars.



# OPTIMIZING YOUR WELL-BEING

## FOOD BANKS AND MEAL DELIVERY SERVICES

Food banks and meal delivery services for elderly and vulnerable populations are essential services that can remain open even during shutdowns. Visit the food bank website for your county to find resources in your area. For the California Bay Area, see the following websites:

- San Francisco and Marin counties: [www.sfmfoodbank.org](http://www.sfmfoodbank.org)
- Alameda county: [www.accfb.org](http://www.accfb.org)
- San Mateo and Santa Clara counties: [www.shfb.org](http://www.shfb.org)



## MINDFUL LIVING



In addition to healthy lifestyle habits, an overall sense of well-being can be achieved by living each day **mindfully**. For optimal health, we must care for our own mind, body, and spirit before we can truly care for others. We often neglect our minds. Body **and** mind really work together in harmony.

When we live mindfully, we ‘pay attention.’

**Listen to your body.** Ask yourself whether you need rest, movement, silence, etc.

**Focus on simple things like breathing.**

**Take time to find peace.** This may be taking a walk in nature, meditation, prayer, or just sitting in the quiet. It doesn’t have to be long – just 5 minutes.

**Purposefully connect with family and friends each day.**

# OPTIMIZING YOUR WELL-BEING

**Be a ‘mindful’ eater.** Turn off the television and close your book, magazine, or newspaper. Before you begin, notice the colors, textures, and smells on your plate. Eat slowly and appreciate each bite. Listen to your body and stop eating when you are satisfied. This may be before you feel “full.” It can take 20 minutes for your stomach to communicate to your brain that you’ve eaten enough. Slow down when you eat and wait 15-20 minutes before going back for seconds.

**Establish daily health rituals.** Each day make a list of things you have to do and then decide which are most important to you. Select the healthy choices for yourself.

**Focus on one thing at a time.** Give it your full attention then move on to the next item. Start by focusing on only the smallest part of the item at a time. Over time, you’ll be able to stay focused on bigger tasks.

**Do purposeful relaxation or meditation every day, even if only for a few minutes.**

**If you are spiritual, consider using practices such as prayer for mindfulness.**

## MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

The goal is to allow your mind to become calm – then you can learn to be present at every moment, be aware, and not distracted.

- Find a quiet place to sit in a chair with your back straight. You should be sitting on the chair with your feet comfortably resting on the floor.
- Set a timer: Start at 2 minutes, and over time, work up to 25 minutes.
- Place your hands together in your lap, with shoulders in a restful position.
- You may keep your eyes closed or open. If eyes open, draw eyes in a downward gaze, not fixed on any object.
- Mentally count your breaths from 1-10. Repeat.
- As you sit and breathe, thoughts will rise up in your mind. Notice their presence, but don’t push or grab them. Let them continue to float up.
- Try doing this exercise every day.



# OPTIMIZING YOUR WELL-BEING

## MAINTAINING CONTROL

Life is going to continue to present challenges. It takes a conscious decision to stay positive, it takes focus, and it takes effort. Keep going! Try these tips and see if it helps you.

- **Focus on today.** It may not be productive to focus on what has happened. What really matters is what you are going to do now. What can you do today?
- **Choose the battles you want to fight.** Research has shown that we tend to manage stress better when we are engaged in battles that we believe in. Decide what is most important to you and spend your energy on those things.
- **Focus on one thing at a time.** Be intentional about working on that thing and deal with it as best you can.
- **Avoid wasting time.** Keep focused on the things that matter most to you, and let the rest go.
- **Secure social support.** Surround yourself with people who have your back. We all need people in our lives who listen and tell us they care, who provide encouragement and practical help, and who share their point of view or give factual information on a particular situation. These types of social support can help you to keep on going.
- **Stop and think.** When things get a little overwhelming, stop, take a breath, and take a few minutes to explore your options. Try the S.T.O.P. practice on the next page.



# OPTIMIZING YOUR WELL-BEING

## S.T.O.P. PRACTICE FOR STRESS

Use this practice as often as you want to help you when you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. It does not take much time and can be very effective.

**S = Stop:** Get away from the situation – go to another room or outside. Get away by yourself so you can be alone even just for a few moments.

**T = Take:** Take 10 deep purposeful breaths and count them. Breathe deep into your abdomen. Visualize the oxygen and energy you are breathing in going deep into your body. Exhale slowly and feel the tension leave your body. As you count each additional breath, breathe in deeper and exhale more fully. Count your breaths if this helps.

**O = Observe:** Observe what's going on with your thoughts, emotions, and body.

- What thoughts do you notice? Does your mind seem distracted, cluttered, settled, etc.?
- What emotions are present? Do you feel calm, restless, irritated, sad, anxious, etc.?
- How does your body feel? Is there tension or tightness anywhere?

Tune in and sit with whatever arises for a few minutes. Just let things be as you settle into being present. Then, open your eyes slowly.

**P = Proceed:** Think about your options of what needs your attention at that moment. What you were going to do may be different now that you have STOPped and taken time to gather yourself. Focus on what you can do.



# OPTIMIZING YOUR WELL-BEING

## MANAGING STRESS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are constantly hit with stressors. Along with daily stressors, we may experience significant events, like a diagnosis of COVID-19 in our family, or the loss of a job, friend or family member, or financial security. You may feel like it is impossible to cope with it all. Life is stressful, and there is no way to avoid it – but you can manage it. Try to adopt as many of these strategies as you can.

### **1. Secure and maintain a positive support system.**

Life is tough but there is no need to go at it alone. More often than not, we have people around us who are truly in our corner. Identify who those people are. Let them help you and be there for them when they need you.

### **2. Acknowledge that the stressor exists.**

When the stressor presents itself, assess if you have the ability to deal with it – if you do not, take a moment to gather yourself before addressing the issue and get help from your support system.

### **3. Avoid unnecessary stress.**

Not all stress can be avoided; it may not be healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. Do your best to eliminate unnecessary stressors from your life.

### **4. Be connected to a higher purpose.**

It is important to have a higher purpose in our lives. Research shows that when we believe in what we are doing and have a sense of being tied to a higher purpose, we can better manage what life throws our way. Keep your eyes and heart on the things that matter most to you.

### **5. Take care of yourself.**

The better we take care ourselves, physically and spiritually, the better we will be able to manage chronic stress in our lives and help those around us.

### **6. Use the S.T.O.P. Practice.**

Use this technique often to manage the stress.

## RESOURCES

Take a picture of this QR bar code using your smart phone to access the digital guide!



We'd like to know what you think!  
Take a brief survey to share your thoughts at <http://tiny.ucsf.edu/RYbtJu> or using the code.



Our team aims to improve patient care through lifestyle studies and publications.

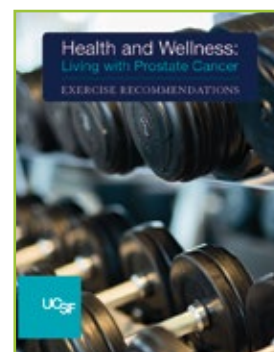
Access our freely available materials at <https://urology.ucsf.edu/lifestyle/resources>  
Some of our materials are highlighted below.



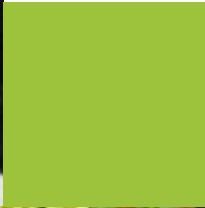
Healthy Eating Tips for All:  
See our tips for healthy items to buy next time you are at the grocery store and daily and weekly eating tips.



See our guidelines for food recommendations for a healthy prostate cancer diet.



Exercise may lower your risk of death from prostate cancer. See our recommendations and tools to stay active.



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