

# Stave off the Quarantine 15 by eating healthy

*Catherine Whitnall*

As the COVID-19 pandemic and state of emergency enters its second month, some people wonder how long their budgets — and waistlines — can handle isolation.

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit registered dietitian Aisha Malik encourages people there is light at the end of the tunnel; and it's not shining from the weight scale.

“This is a stressful time for everyone with the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Malik, noting every person's situation is different in some way.

Many are trying to cope with disruptive routines, working from home and home-schooling children.

“Even in the best of times, making healthy food choices can be challenging. My recommendation is not to focus on the scale.”

Dubbed the Quarantine 15, some people are finding it difficult to eat well and reduce stress during the pandemic. Others are missing routines that included daily walks and activities with friends, attending a fitness program or going to the gym.

One of Malik's easiest suggestions is to stick to a daily routine, particularly one that existed prior to the pandemic. Go to bed and get up on the same schedule as before and try to eat meals and snacks at regular times.

With people urged to limit outings, preparing a two-week menu and grocery list — about half of which should be fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables — is simply good planning. It not only helps save time and money, but it also offers opportunities for families to share some time together.

Add an extra health boost by ramping up on legumes like beans and chickpeas, nuts and seeds, as well as whole grains such as quinoa, wild rice and pasta.

Malik also encourages people to take a closer look at their snacking habits. There are plenty of healthy — and budget-friendly — snack and meal ideas available at [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca).

But staying healthy isn't just about food.

“Think of ways you can relax,” says Malik. “Meditate, take a bath, listen to your favourite music, read a book; whatever helps.”

She also encourages people to “keep moving.” There is a wide range of things people can do at home, especially with many fitness facilities and individuals offering virtual programs for everything from cycling to yoga. Where possible, go for a walk. Even simple things like yard work and hand-washing the car make a difference.

For those thinking of starting a diet, Malik said it's better to focus on eating healthier and being more active.

“Diets don't work, so don't even try, especially with everything that is going on right now,” says Malik. “Instead, try to eat a variety of foods, especially fruits and vegetables, and use Canada's Food Guide (<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>) to help plan for healthy eating.”

Malik also doesn't recommend people make any major changes to their lifestyle, such as quitting smoking or drinking, unless it was already a plan.

“This is a challenging time and people are experiencing some major changes in their lives,” says Malik, pointing out it's important to recognize making significant behavioural changes can be even more difficult. “Everyone makes these changes at their own pace and if someone feels ready, they can absolutely try.”

Mental health is as important as physical health and Malik encourages people to reach out for support through such resources as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (<http://www.camh.ca/>) and Connex Ontario (<https://www.connexontario.ca/>). The new Wellness Together Canada portal (<https://ca.portal.gs/>) offers free online resources, tools, apps and connections to trained volunteers and qualified mental health professionals when needed.

But perhaps the most important thing, says Malike, is that, when it comes to COVID-19, there are no short cuts.

“There is no one pill, drink, or super food that can fight off coronavirus,” stresses Malik. “My recommendation is to incorporate a variety of foods such as vegetables, fruit, protein rich foods, and whole grains in meals and snacks. Eating these foods each day provides all the essential nutrients needed to help build a stronger immune system.”

Malik also reminds people that the best way to combat the virus from spreading is by ensuring proper hand hygiene — washing hands frequently with soap and water — practising physical distancing and staying home.

For more resources and information related to COVID-19 and prevention visit [www.hkpr.on.ca](http://www.hkpr.on.ca).