

CAMHELPS

CamHelps provides you with tips and resources to support your mental well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic



TOPIC: Eat Well

Stress. It seems to be everywhere at the moment. Predictable routines have been replaced with uncertainty. Social connections are maintained on-line as opposed to in-person. Rather than sitting in traffic, people are sitting at remote workstations in their home offices, dens, playrooms, and kitchens. For the first time in a long time, we spend more time at home than at work – the complete opposite of how things were a few short months ago.

Attributable, in part, to these factors - and a dizzying array of other small and large changes that have taken place since March -- it is understandable that people's levels of stress are elevated, persistent, and, at times, overwhelming.

When people are under stress, they look for relief and comfort in a variety of ways that may include stress-related eating. Under more normal circumstances, most of the food choices that people make are not harmful when done in moderation. But when placed under immediate or prolonged stress, our bodies are hardwired to either temporarily stop eating or to eat foods that make us feel better. Typically, this means foods with high amounts of salt, fat, and sugar. We know that eating too much of these kinds of foods can actually weaken the body's immune system, increase fatigue, and revert us to feeling unhappy and depressed. It can be a vicious cycle.

Working remotely can be particularly challenging when it comes to eating well. Snack foods are readily available. Quick snack breaks can be frequent. Working remotely often means working alone which can result in people looking for something to eat that temporarily lifts their mood or offers a sense of comfort.

Eating well throughout the current COVID-19 situation can be challenging – but it is possible. This edition of CamHelps provides some tips and resources related to stress-related eating and how you can empower yourself to make smart choices.

A note from the CamHelps writers: Our intent in this article is to provide general information about how stress can impact food choices. We acknowledge that for some people, food-related issues can be a significant struggle that requires professional support and care. Contact information for Homewood Health's counselling and nutrition services are provided below. Be encouraged and take care of yourself and each other.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

CHECK your motivation

When you find yourself reaching for a snack, be alert to your motivations. Consider the following:

- Ask yourself how you're feeling right now;
- Ask yourself whether you're eating because you are hungry or because your mood is low, or you are feeling upset, angry, sad, or lonely;
- Keeping a daily mood journal and including mention of your eating patterns or habits.



PREPARE in advance

Rather than let your emotions fuel your food choices, take control of your eating habits by preparing in advance.

- Fill a cooler with healthy food choices and keep it by your workstation. Make good food easily accessible;
- Set time reminders that prompt you to drink water on a regular basis. It's too easy to get caught up in work priorities such that you forget to keep hydrated throughout the day;
- Portion out smaller amounts of 'feel good' snack foods rather than tempt yourself with repeat visits to the bag of chips, container of ice cream, cookie jar, etc.;
- Prepare meals for the week in advance. Many people were doing this prior to working remotely. Having meals planned and prepped several days in advance lowers stress and provides time to make sure meals are well balanced.

CREATE healthy boundaries

In the office or in the home office, it can be tempting to snack and eat meals while remaining seated behind the computer. Not only does this prevent you from changing your posture and position, but you can easily lose track of portion sizes when you're focussed on something else.

- Commit to at least one walking meal break each week;
- Work in one place and eat in another. Change rooms, change chairs, trade inside for outside...find a place that's peaceful and relaxing to enjoy your break from working;
- Set times for your meal breaks during the day. Honour yourself by blocking off eating time in your calendar and let others know you are unavailable.

SHOP for groceries with intention

Stress-fueled eating is often enabled by stress-fueled grocery shopping – and the process of bringing food home from the store has certainly become more involved. Here are some ways to help ensure your shopping trips result in foods that fuel the body and mind:

- **Shop with a list.** Loading up the cart without one can lead to impulse buying and, as explained above, stress-sparked impulses do not always lead to the best choices.
- **Shop local.** Consider sourcing some of your food purchases from local farms, farmers markets, produce stands, etc. Quite often these places sell food that is fresher and less processed than the food options available in larger chain stores. Plus, you'll be purchasing from people in your own community which benefits everyone.
- **Shop relaxed.** The process for getting groceries has become more involved thanks to physical distancing requirements and concerns about virus transmission. Practice some relaxation techniques that you can use if the act of shopping becomes overwhelming. Try deep breathing. Stay relaxed by giving yourself lots of time to get your shopping done. Less rushing around translates to less stress.
- **Shop before hungry.** Often when you shop hungry, your cart can fill with craving-inspired food choices or with more food than is actually necessary.

RESOURCES

Information About Stress-Related Eating

- The [Canada Food Guide](#) is a useful starting point for making balanced and informed food-related decisions.
- Want to include more stress-reducing foods in your diet? Check out the Food Network's [Top 10 Foods for Stress Relief](#).
- The BC Provincial Government offers some informative and practical tips about [Healthy Eating to Decrease Stress](#).
- Global News aired a segment in November 2019 about [Foods to Avoid When Stressed](#). It's worth a look.
- This New York Times article [How to Manage Stress Eating \(or not eating\)](#) offers some gentle tips to help when COVID-19 related stress affects your usual eating habits.

Homewood Health Supports and Services

Take advantage of Homewood's programs and resources related to personal nutrition:

- [Lifesmart Personal Nutritional Coaching \(PDF\)](#) – a coaching program that provides one-on-one support from a nutrition coach and registered dietitian to help set and achieve personal nutrition and weight-management goals.
- [Jumpstart Your Wellness training program \(PDF\)](#) – a self-directed program that offers a comprehensive approach to behaviour change. You will have access to a readiness questionnaire, initial coaching consultation, online tools and resources including a Jumpstart your Wellness Workbook, and expert tips on healthy lifestyles and exercise.
- **Contact a Homewood Professional** – sometimes people struggle with food-related mental health issues that require professional support. Contact Homewood Health to speak with a counsellor for more information. Phone lines are open 24/7 and all calls are confidential:
 - Toll free: 1-800-663-1142
 - TTY: 1-888-384-1152
- **Healthy Eating Articles** – Homewood provides multiple articles to help expand one's knowledge on healthy eating habits, some examples include:
 - Article: [How to have a Healthy Relationship with Food](#) (PDF)
 - Article: [Learn about Eating Disorders](#) (PDF)

If you are experiencing a mental well-being related emergency or need urgent support, please contact:
the Vancouver Island Crisis Line at 1-888-494-3888 - OR

the Vancouver Island Crisis Line provides 24/7 support, crisis intervention, information, and resources to Island residents

the KUU-US Crisis Response Service at 1-800-588-8717 - OR
the KUU-US Crisis Response Service provides 24/7 culturally-aware crisis support to Indigenous people in B.C.

in the event of an emergency call 911.



WORKING REMOTELY RESOURCES

[10 General Tips for Working Remotely](#)

[Remote Work Guidelines](#)

[Tips For Workplace Leaders in
Supervising Remote Workers](#)



MORE INFORMATION

Questions about Camosun's Employee Wellness resources – including suggestions for future CamHelps – can be sent to healthytogether@camosun.bc.ca.

Frequently check Camosun's [COVID -19 information page](#) and [FAQs](#).

Workplace Leaders looking for support with managing remote workgroups can contact Nancy Ali, Organization and People Development Specialist (AliN@camosun.bc.ca)