

The Nutrition Problems of Covid-19

Over Eating vs Disordered Eating

“I’ve gained 15 pounds!”, says a panicked voice of yet another patient on the other end of the phone.

“The quarantine-19” is a phrase I’ve become familiar with during these last few weeks. Horrified patients and even my own staff have discussed their boredom and frustration with the same dinner night after night, and the exhaustion of having to create a variety of meals to keep their families happy.

Between being a parent, housekeeper, school teacher, activity director, and chef most of us are forced to be all roles - 24/7. We are keeping the kids busy, fed and entertained by baking for an activity, leaving high fat and sugar foods on our counters for easily accessible enjoyment. Oh and we can’t forget pleasing your spouse and boss too, right? Talk about “**stress eating**”.

“I’m struggling to keep up with my food plan,” says a patient suffering with an eating disorder, as there isn’t enough food available in the grocery stores.

For those patients who have been working through disordered eating, transitioning to a stay-at-home lifestyle where food is often a main focus of your day is an unfortunate reality; it could be extremely difficult and challenging to fight your inner thoughts. This can lead to either “stress eating”, “binging”, “purging”, “restricting” and overall feeling stuck.

One of the symptoms of having an eating disorder is isolation and many patients have worked hard to combat this through socialization and healthy routines. This unfortunately has become ever more difficult over the last 3 months.

No matter what relationship you have or had with food, this quarantine time is extremely difficult for everybody.

To distract from our new normal and relieve some anxiety, our constant laps to the pantry for a little treat is partially what is causing us to gain weight.

While a cookie or a few handfuls of salty snacks wouldn't normally upset our diet (or waist size), with the lack of activity during quarantine, burning off these extra calories has now become a part-time job. Our normal activity before quarantine was approximately 2,000 steps per day through just routine appointments and activities. This has now come to a stop.

Many people are getting outside for a one mile walk 3-4x per week. This is great! However, this is equivalent to your pre-pandemic daily routine of simply running errands or walking around an office. Now, we are forced to do more. Keep doing the mile, but work your workout routines in, as well!

Encouraging a patient to normalize their eating habits and to add positive activities into their life is part of our normal treatment plan for any eating disordered patient. During this quarantine time, this is nearly impossible; our minds are forced to think about food, activity and weight. While we support positive exercise, it is very difficult for patients during their recovery to balance beneficial activity versus obsessing over their step count.

While there aren't many activities to occupy our newly found free-time with, it seems like exercising is the easy answer. Unfortunately, many of our eating disorder patients are over doing it and rationalizing it with "there is nothing else to do." We are supportive of healthy exercise and nutrition, however it is most important to keep our end-goal in sight: **recovery!**

Finding the balance for all of this during such trying times is a true skill no matter what your current relationship is with food.

Some people are just waiting for this to be over, to get back to a “pre-pandemic normal.” Unfortunately, it may be a long time before we are there, so we need to start taking care of ourselves now.

We are not getting dressed daily, well I guess some of us think we are. Maybe we are wearing nicer sweatpants and sweatshirts that we forgot we had. Some days patients tell us they are not even showering.

Are you blow-drying your hair ? Putting on makeup? Shaving? Trimming your hair?

If you're falling into that trap of less grooming and not putting on fitted clothes - you may not even notice the weight gain or weight loss you are experiencing.

This is a serious issue. Us dietitians and other experts will confirm it's true that many Americans have been struggling with their weight – either as a slow steady gain, which is usually the toughest to drop later, or a slow a steady loss which is usually the hardest to regain later.

Normally our office deals with the mind and body combination through our team of Registered Dietitians and Psychotherapists. **We deal with the underlying reasons why people overeat or undereat: boredom and anxiety are at the top of that list.** Knowing this, **it's not a surprise that we are doing more mindless snacking/grazing like never before** or **restricting, bingeing, purging or obsessing like never before.**

A pandemic of this magnitude has not been seen in nearly a century. With this historic situation, we're all experiencing new things for the first time which can feel uncomfortable, scary and anxious.

Keeping patients motivated to take good care of themselves during this time is only part of our mission. Helping with proper food choices, healthy recipe ideas, and mindful eating is just half the battle. Some are getting very comfortable in the safety of their homes, thinking “We can't get sick if we

stay in,” or “there’s no need to worry that our kids are not being social.” However, some people are stuck at home with family they don’t like and others are scared to transition back to our ‘old normal’. Especially now with an increase or decrease of 10-15 pounds and summer being just around the corner.

As you continue to fight against the everyday challenges of the pandemic period, know that we are here to help. Our group of Therapists and Registered Dietitians at Staci Leavitt Mind & Body can get you back on track and back into your regular pants (larger or smaller)! Please contact us via text at (516) 846-3398 to set up a consultation today. We are taking video conferencing or phone sessions. We look forward to helping you achieve your goals!