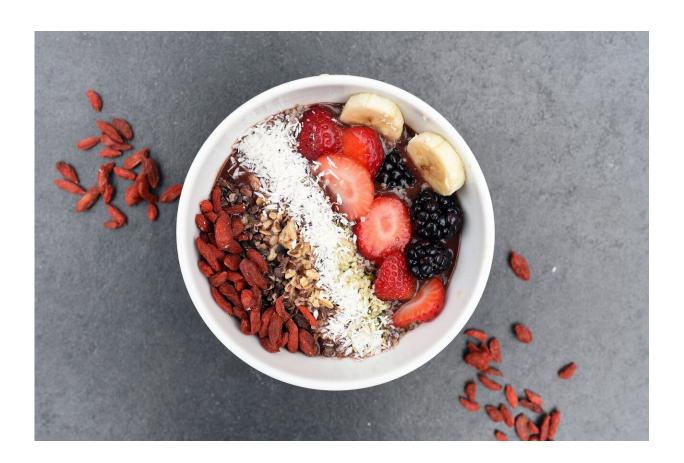# Keeping bad habits at bay during the coronavirus outbreak

March 20 2020

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If your wine rack looks empty, the biscuit barrel bare, you're binge-watching way too much TV, and you're dying for a cigarette, chances are you're not alone.

With much of the world on public lockdown and scores of people working from home, [stress levels](link) are sky high which makes us all more vulnerable to temptation.

The good news is experts at the University of Bristol can help you better understand your anxiety-fueled cravings and offer ways to keep those weaknesses in check.

Stay smoke-free

Tobacco kills more than 8 million people each year, according to the World Health Organisation.

"Smoking is one of the biggest causes of death and illness in the UK, so I would always encourage people to stop. But giving up is hard even at the best of times, due to the addictiveness of tobacco and especially when we're stressed or anxious," said Professor Marcus Munafo, Professor of Biological Psychology in the School of Psychological Science.

"There are various treatment options to help people quit, such as [nicotine replacement products](link) including patches and gum. E-cigarettes have been shown to help, are recommended by Public Health England, and are likely to be considerably less harmful.

"As well as delivering nicotine in a less harmful way, they also provide a substitute for the behavioral routine of smoking."

Among ex-smokers, stress can be a cause of relapse so it's important to stay wary and intervene if necessary.

Professor Munafo added: "In the long-run, anxiety tends to go down after stopping smoking, so giving up or staying smoke-free might actually be better for our mental health.

"If you're feeling a really strong urge to return to smoking, try nicotine replacement products instead, and possibly a behavioral substitution, like holding a pen or pencil, rather than a cigarette. E-cigarettes might help, although generally these should only be used by smokers seeking to stop."

Raise a small glass

Pouring a [glass of wine](link) is a popular way to unwind after a long hard day. But alcohol presents many health pitfalls and can soon spiral out of control.

"Stress can easily lead to us drinking too much. Although many people use alcohol to relax, often it's the psychological effect of a beer or your favorite tipple that helps as much as the effect of alcohol itself," Professor Munafo said.

"There are many low alcohol and alcohol-free products—beers, wines, and even spirits. Stocking these at home will allow you to have a drink in the evening without actually consuming alcohol."

If you can't resist opening a bottle of wine, remember size matters.

"The size of wine glasses has grown over the years and this presents additional health risks. Using smaller glasses and buying half, rather than full-size, bottles can help you cut down alcohol consumption," Professor Munafo added.

"Try to practice mindful drinking by focusing on the moment and savoring the experience."

Manage the munchies

Feeling stressed or depressed can often lead to snacking and overeating. With working from home on top, it's the perfect recipe for calorie overload. Fortunately, there are techniques to help avoid an expanding waistline.

"Regular trips to the kitchen mean you're seeing food and more prone to ad-hoc snacking. This is problematic because there's evidence to show you're unlikely to compensate for this and eat less at your next meal," said Professor Jeff Brunstrom, Professor of Experimental Psychology in the School of Psychological Science.

"I would therefore advise keeping snacks out of sight, particularly energy-dense options like chocolate, crisps and sweets."

Snacking while devouring a box set can also be dangerous.

"When you're distracted, evidence shows it takes more to feel full. So watching a film with a packet of biscuits or large bag of crisps on the coffee table is an invitation to overeat," Professor Brunstrom explained.

Rather than using self-isolation as an excuse to order takeout, he recommends taking the opportunity to be more creative in the kitchen and cook meals from scratch.

"Take away foods tend to be laden with fat. By cooking with more fruit and vegetables you could aid weight loss and still feel satisfied," Professor Brunstrom said. "It's also advisable to pre-plate meals, as there's emerging evidence that social dining with large amounts of food on the table results in eating an awful lot more."

Vacate the couch

Self-isolating shouldn't be a reason to put your feet up and abandon your

fitness routine. Staying active is vital and every step counts.

"When we expend less energy, we're not very good at reducing our energy consumption to balance this. That's why it's important to stay as active as possible, despite the current constraints, as well as paying attention to your diet," Professor Brunstrom said.

"Home-based exercise is an option and people are still being encouraged to go outside for a run, walk, or bike ride while practicing social distancing. Remember to keep moving and avoid sitting still for extended periods, which can be a trap if working from home."

Besides improving your physical health, exercise can also prove the perfect tonic.

"Rather than reaching for a chocolate bar, getting out in the fresh air can be an equally or even more effective way to lift spirits."

Provided by University of Bristol