

# 'Stress eating' while social distancing? Here are tips to avoid it

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Trapped in the house with a cupboard full of food: Social distancing

during the COVID-19 pandemic can spawn an unintended side effect—stress eating.

It may be tempting to ease your anxiety with your favorite comfort foods, but emotional eating can hurt you physically and mentally, according to experts from Rush University Medical Center in Chicago.

These tips, from Joyce Corsica, director of outpatient psychotherapy and bariatric psychology at Rush, and clinical psychologist Mackenzie Kelly, can help you ward off bad eating habits.

- **Set a schedule and stick to it:** It will help stop you from going to the kitchen for an unnecessary nosh. "Include chunks of time for work, relaxation/exercise, eating, and communication with others," Corsica suggested. "If you have an outline planned, you are less likely to feel like the day is a big empty space, which can make you feel rudderless and may lead to overeating."
- **Eat healthy meals:** Kelly recommended planning meals and snacks at the start of each day. "If you wait until you're hungry to decide what you're going to eat, you may end up eating more or choosing something higher in calories than if you had planned your meal and snacks in advance," she warned. Remember: Processed foods may be convenient, but these foods make it easier to overeat. Choose healthy options instead.
- **Avoid cravings:** When you're bored, it's easy to turn to [food](#), so keep busy. "If you feel stuck, bored, lost, or frustrated, try to understand and label the feeling and then decide what you can do about it," Corsica said. "That might be finding a smaller task to work on, changing tasks entirely, taking a break, or checking in with a colleague."
- **Keep tasks separate:** Don't use your bedroom as a dining room. "Designate one place in your home as the place where you will eat and try to keep your work and relaxation spaces in your home

separate from where you eat," Kelly said.

- **Find other ways to manage stress:** Try reaching out to a friend or [family members](#), cleaning out a closet or drawer, streaming a free home exercise class, or any other healthy strategy to help reduce stress.
- **Stay connected:** It's easy to isolate yourself. Use technology to keep in touch with loved ones. Host a Netflix watch party, FaceTime friends and loved ones often, and don't be afraid to give them a call.

**More information:** For more on coping with COVID-19 stress, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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