

# Happy Nutrition Month! Eating together during COVID-19

Eating is a social activity; it's a way to celebrate and also comfort ourselves in times of stress or emotion. It's a way to share culture and new foods with others, a way to connect and build relationships. To this end, Melissa Murray, a Registered Dietitian in St. Joseph's Urban Family Health Team, shares her tips to do this as safely as possible during a pandemic.

## Involve your kids

Involve family members in the planning and preparation of meals and snacks (assuming that everyone involved is healthy). With kids home from school, now is a perfect time to involve them in choosing what vegetable they want for dinner, have them pull food from the fridge or stir ingredients together. It's a great way to instill cooking skills and habits that can last a lifetime and can help with picky eating!

When cooking or eating together, ensure everyone involved practices good hand washing, surfaces are cleaned frequently and safe food handling is practiced. If tasting during cooking/baking, ensure this utensil is not re-used. Avoid serving family-style or finishing your kids' leftovers. When having snacks, pre-portion them, avoid sharing bowls or double dipping. Pre-portioning snacks also helps with portion control!

## Start a Conversation

For many people, sharing meals is a favourite time of day to interact with family and friends. It allows people to connect, share traditions, learn, communicate and listen. If you are new to family meals, here are some tips to keep in mind:

1. Do give everyone at the table a chance to speak.
2. Don't use it as a time to scold or discipline picky eaters.
3. Do ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
4. Focus on the food, by asking what everyone's favourite aspect is or what sensations they notice as they eat.

## What benefits may I see?

Children who eat with their family often have more nutritious diets, better academic performance, a lower risk of becoming overweight or of developing eating disorders. Adults tend to have a more nutritious diet and healthier body weights, and older adults have improved nutrient intake and lower rates of malnutrition.

## What if I live alone?

Eating meals alone can increase feelings of loneliness, increasingly so with today's isolation policies. This can contribute to both over and under eating, depending on the person. Try sharing a "virtual" meal with a friend or family far away through Facetime or Skype, phoning an

elderly neighbour or starting a recipe club where you share new/favourite recipes with friends/family.

Looking to try something new? Check out this Mexican Squash & Bean Salad and other great recipes @*cookspiration*!

<https://www.cookspiration.com/recipe.aspx?perma=C4ZoamMIPiJ&q=34>