



## Staying at Home During the Pandemic? Use Technology to Stay Connected

Technology can help you maintain social connections if you're staying home during the coronavirus pandemic, an expert says.

"When using technology to stay connected, prioritize keeping deeper, meaningful connections with people," said Stephen Benning, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Benning suggests using Skype or other video messaging to see and hear from people who are important to you. An old-fashioned phone call will let you maintain vocal connection, and your favorite social media site's messaging app will let you keep an individual or group dialog going.

"In these deep, close, personalized connections, it's **ok** to share your anxieties and fears. Validating that other people are concerned or even scared can help them feel like they are grounded in reality," he said.

But don't stop there, Benning added.



"Use these deep connections to plan out what to do, to take concrete actions to live the lives you want," he suggested in a university news release. "To the extent possible, share hobbies or other pursuits together if you're shut off from work or other personal goals for success."

Hold book clubs on speakerphone or group meetings on Zoom. Find online versions of bridge, board games, role-playing adventures or other diversions. Make a date with friends to watch a show or movie on TV or streaming media, and share your reactions on a group chat.

Curate playlists on music sites to share with your friends to express your current mood or uplift one another. Organize a creative group to write, paint or do other artistic activities. This is a good time to use shared courseware to learn new skills, Benning added.

If you find your anxiety levels rising due to an overload of coronavirus information, take a break from news about the pandemic.

"As a first step, you might disable notifications on your phone from news or social media apps so that you can control when you search for information rather than having it pushed to you," Benning said.

**Other options include:** using the muting options on Twitter, snoozing posts or posters on Facebook or filtering words on Instagram. You can also set an alarm or use an app or browser extension to limit the time you spend online and then turn your device off.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

**Source:** University of Nevada, Las Vegas, news release, March 20, 2020

# Stress Eating While Social Distancing? Here's Tips to Avoid It

**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](https://www.cdc.gov).

**Source:** Rush University Medical Center, news release, March 26, 2020.

## Health Tip: 4-7-8 Breath Relaxation Exercise

Breathing exercises can help you relax and manage stress, says the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. The center suggests using the 4-7-8 breath exercise:

- Exhale completely through your mouth.
- Close your mouth and inhale through your nose to a mental count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale through your mouth to a count of 8.
- Repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

