

Wellness Wednesday



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4 Positive Ways The Pandemic Has Changed How We Eat

Sure, we've endured meat and flour shortages, but the coronavirus could improve many aspects of our food systems.

The coronavirus pandemic has uprooted food systems as we knew them, leading to grocery shortages and devastating the restaurant industry. But it has also driven some food trends that have helped people stay connected — and could lead to long-lasting, positive change.

It's up to us to decide whether they continue long after the pandemic is over.

1. Family Meals Are Making A Comeback

Research has shown that 30%-35% of families often eat fewer than three meals a week together, but the lockdown has changed that for the better. Kids are having dinner with their parents, which hasn't always been the norm for families with dual-income parents, and the benefits are proven. Studies have found that eating together as a family helps children with self-esteem and success in school and lowers the risk for depression. According to the Family Meals Movement, lower rates of childhood obesity are associated with kids eating meals with their families.



Although some parents have more time to plan meals due to COVID-19, family dinners don't have to be labor-intensive — you don't even have to cook. According to Thalia E. Prum, an accredited dietitian and nutritionist focused on family meal planning, "Takeout can be a great option, as well as canned or frozen vegetables, or ready-to-use meals."

According to Prum, children reap the benefits of family meals from as few as three meals a week. It's also important to note that it doesn't always have to be dinner.

"A family meal can definitely be breakfast or lunch," Prum said. "Taking the time to eat together is the most important thing, whether it's sitting on the floor, in a car or under a tree. Hopefully, parents will find that the family meal is a pleasant experience they'll want to continue beyond the pandemic. They just need to make it a priority."

2. People Are Eating More Plant-Based Foods

Meat shortages due to health issues in the meat-packing industry have forced people to rely more on plant-based foods. This isn't a such a bad thing, given that plant-based foods are healthy for both individuals and our planet. Livestock alone produces 18% of greenhouse gases, more than cars, planes and all other forms of transport put together.

But you don't have to go vegan to improve your health or the environment. Registered nurse and dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner created the Flexitarian Diet, which has been rated highly by U.S. News & World Report, for those who want to eat more "vegetarianish," as she described it. The term flexitarian, coined by Blatner over a decade ago, is derived from the words "flexible" and "vegetarian."

Blatner said she has seen a spike of interest in her diet plan amid the pandemic. "People are more focused on their health right now, and the pro-plants, not anti-meat, approach appeals to those interested in making healthier food choices," she told HuffPost.

Blatner offered some suggestions on how to make the transition to more plant-based foods easier:

- **Re-portion your plate:** "If you usually serve a 9-ounce steak, reduce it to 4 ounces."
- **Re-invent your favorites:** "When serving stir-fry chicken, try switching out half the chicken with beans; or for beef tacos, switch out half the beef with lentils."
- **Try a new vegetarian recipe each week:** "Source one recipe from your favorite cookbook, online or from friends each week. By the end of the year you'll have 50 new vegetarian recipes."

3. We're Baking More For Ourselves And Others

Working away from home often leaves little time for meal preparation, let alone baking. But working from home has its perks, and baking can be one of them.

Many of us have jumped into baking as a welcome distraction these days, with sourdough bread and banana bread rising to the top of Google recipe searches. Cortney Anderson-Sanford is no exception. An NBC food show winner and etiquette coach; she has taken the time to reconnect with family through food.

Her son, Ollie, graduated from high school this year, but there was no ceremony due to COVID-19. "It was all too much for Ollie. He decided to celebrate his birthday instead of graduation, so I baked him a Momofuku birthday cake (inspired by the Milkbar). It took his mind off the fact that he missed out on a graduation ceremony," she said.

And the love doesn't stop there. Delivering food to those in need helps others while getting us out of isolation. Not everyone is able to leave their home right now — for those at high risk, the delivery of a meal, baked goods or groceries can be a lifesaver. Providing nourishment to those in need also allows for much-needed human connection.

Not to mention, baking can bring a host of psychological benefits, including stress relief. It's a productive form of self-expression and communication, mindfulness and distraction, and it fits within a type of therapy known as behavioral activation.

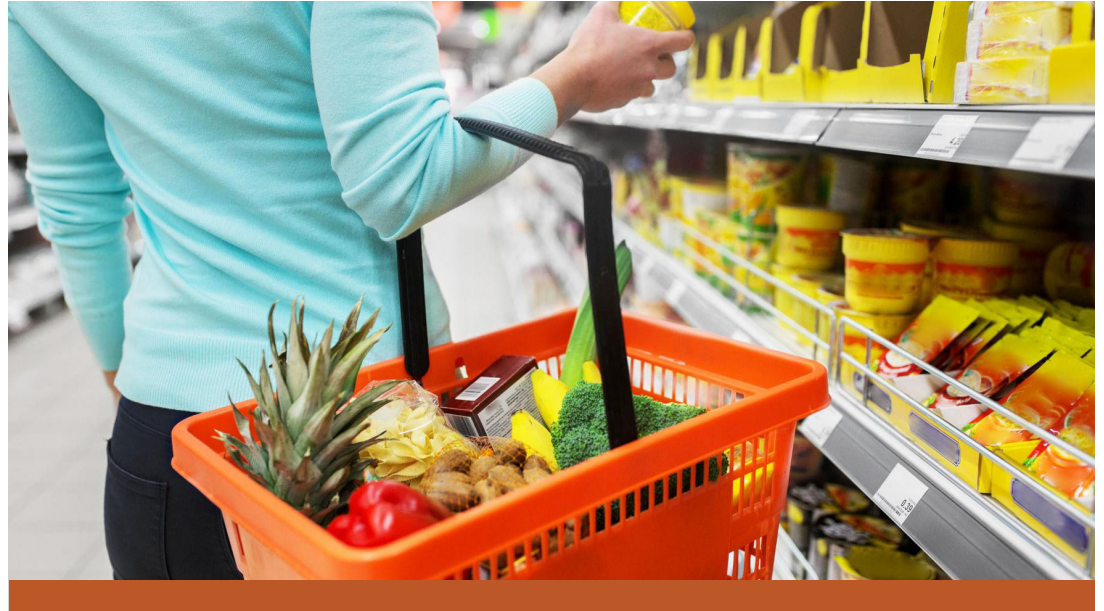


4. We're Buying Locally

The upside of shortages in the supply chain is that some people have turned to local sources for food, boosting small businesses hit hard by the pandemic.

When shelter-at-home mandates went into effect, more Americans began cooking at home, and they started looking for healthy options. Sales of regionally milled flour and sustainably caught fish and membership in community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs), which are most often focused on fruits and vegetables, have skyrocketed.

People are also supporting local vendors, and the money has helped sustain small businesses, some of which have been surprisingly adaptive. "Some farms, who sell direct to consumers through CSAs and farmers markets, have expanded or offered online ordering, pickup and delivery to adapt to market closures or limited market access, and the need to provide products with minimal contact," said Lillie Weiya



Zeng, a U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesperson. Farmers markets are installing hand sanitizer stations and encouraging proper social distancing with signs, while restaurants like Chez Panisse are selling produce boxes from their local suppliers.

While many of us are hoping our lives will go back to "normal," these are just four ways things could be even better than they were before.



GRILLED CHICKEN WITH SPINACH & MELTED MOZZARELLA



195 Calories | *PREP TIME: 2 mins* | *COOK TIME: 15 mins* | *TOTAL TIME: 17 mins*
YIELD: 6 Servings | *COURSE: Dinner* | *CUISINE: Italian*

INGREDIENTS

24 oz 3 large chicken breasts sliced in half lengthwise to make 6

kosher salt and pepper to taste

1 tsp olive oil

3 cloves garlic, crushed

10 oz frozen spinach, drained

3 oz shredded part skim mozzarella

1/2 cup roasted red pepper, sliced in strips (packed in water)

olive oil spray

Grilled chicken topped with spinach, melted mozzarella and roasted peppers – a quick and easy chicken dish your family will love!

TIPS:

Perfect for those hot days, no need to turn your oven on, you can do this all outside on the grill! If you're doing this on the grill, make sure to have the sauteed spinach and peppers ready.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 piece, Calories: 195 kcal, Carbohydrates: 3.5 g, Protein: 31 g, Fat: 6 g, Saturated Fat: 2 , Cholesterol: 91 mg, Sodium: 183 mg, Fiber: 1.5 g, Sugar: 0.5 g
Source: Skinnytaste.com



INSTRUCTIONS



How to make:

- 1.) Preheat oven to 400°F. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Lightly spray a grill or grill pan with oil. Cook chicken until no longer pink, about 2 to 3 minutes per side.
- 2.) Heat a skillet over medium heat. Add oil and garlic, sauté for 30 seconds, add spinach, salt and pepper. Cook until heated through, 2 to 3 minutes.
- 3.) Place chicken on a baking sheet, divide spinach evenly between the 6 pieces and place on top. Top each with 1/2 oz mozzarella, roasted peppers and bake until melted, about 3 minutes.

FEATURED EXERCISE

Grab your dumbbells – let's get to work!

Superset 3: Reverse Fly

Works: shoulders, chest, abs, obliques

Hold a dumbbell in each hand, and stand with your feet hips-width distance apart. Keep a slight bend in your knees. Fold your torso forward so your back is almost parallel with the floor and your hands are under your shoulders. Draw your abs in to protect your lower back.



As you exhale, lift your arms out to the side so they are in line with your shoulders. Keep a slight bend in your elbows. To get the upper back working, think of sliding your shoulder blades together.

As you inhale, slowly lower the dumbbells back to the starting position. This counts as one rep.

Complete 10 reps.

Source: <https://www.popsugar.com/fitness/photo-gallery/45871924/image/45872456/Superset-3-Reverse-Fly>

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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