



Benefits of Eating Together and How To Do So Safely During the Pandemic



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Always follow public health guidelines in your area relating to gatherings, masks, hand hygiene, and physical distancing requirements.

Looking back to the pre-COVID days, we cannot help but reminisce over the little things we took for granted such as sharing meals with others, whether that be at our favorite restaurant, at home or at work. The ability to catch up with a friend over a nice meal or as a part of a larger social setting, was never given a second thought.

Food and socializing are some of the many ways we express ourselves, share our feelings, emotions, identities and cultures and traditions.

This can range from gathering for a meal to celebrate happy, accomplished moments or even using food as a source of comfort in times of stress and change. However, little did we know how much impact this pandemic would have on mealtime. Eating alone and in physically distanced settings has become the new normal and feeling connected with others through food has been more challenging than ever.

In this article, we discuss some of the benefits of eating together and provide you with some tips on how to eat together safely as we navigate the pandemic.

Benefits of eating together ^{1,2}

Canada's Food Guide emphasizes how eating together is part of healthy eating. Some benefits of eating together may include:

- Consuming more nutritious meals
- Improved eating patterns and appetite
- Improved self-esteem and reduced risk of depression
- Establishing a healthy relationship with food
- Enhanced communication skills
- Feeling connected
- Learning about cultures and food traditions
- Trying out new foods and meals
- Celebrating special events

Tips on eating together safely during the pandemic

There is no doubt that these unprecedented times continue to impact our mental health our social connectedness. Here are some tips on eating together safely during the pandemic:

- Jointly prepare a homecooked meal with the immediate members living in your household.
- Plan a virtual lunch/dinner date with a friend or loved one. There are various social media and communication platforms out there to choose from such as Facetime, Skype, Zoom, Facebook and more.
- Plan a virtual themed night with friends and family, such as a tropical getaway, summer BBQ, Tex-Mex Fiesta, or Carnival. Dress up for the theme, listen to some music and play games while you enjoy a meal together virtually.

- Show your love and support to local businesses by ordering take out and enjoying a meal virtually with your loved ones. Visit www.foodiesunite.ca for a list of local restaurants in your area and how you can show your support.
- Plan a virtual international food day such as Thai, Mexican, Italian, or Mediterranean. Each attendee can make or order a dish from a different region of the world. This will give you the opportunity to learn about different cultural foods while you enjoy a meal together as a group.



References

Health Canada. (2020, October 14). Eat meals with others. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/eat-meals-others/>

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