

Quarantine 15: Pandemic Binge Eating

By Ellen D. Hosafros, Director of Corporate Communications, Corporate Synergies
April 2020

Editor's note: The impact of the coronavirus pandemic is changing life day by day. Please visit [HealthDiscovery.org/covid-19](https://www.healthdiscovery.org/covid-19) frequently for updates to help you and your family manage the crisis.

These days COVID-19 is on everyone's lips, and judging by the Facebook posts I've read, apparently so is food. Binge eating while sheltering at home has become such a trend that a term has emerged to describe it: The Quarantine 15.

Together we're learning together how difficult it is to function in a pandemic. Fitness centers are closed and it's harder to keep up an exercise routine and blow off steam. There is anxiety over job losses and availability of supplies and worry if family members or friends come down with symptoms of the virus. Understandably, everyone is stressed over the coronavirus crisis and it makes sense to look for comfort wherever it's available...and that seems to be the refrigerator.

Boredom from home sheltering is another culprit, leading to "fog eating." Picture sitting on the sofa, TV remote in one hand and an empty bag of Reese's Pieces in the other. A victim of fog eating has no recollection of hoovering down all that candy. I could write a book on fog eating.

We're yearning for normalcy and turning to comfort food simply because it's there.

Anxiety, boredom and stress lead to the Quarantine 15, or (heaven forbid) the Quarantine 50!

Overeating can lead to obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes-four of several underlying health conditions that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),¹ can cause serious problems for COVID-19 patients.



I have one of those underlying conditions. Fifteen years ago, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and I must work every day to control my blood sugar through diet and physical activity. Yes, it's a pain. Yes, it's worth it.

Viral infections like COVID-19 can increase inflammation in diabetics and pose a risk for a life-threatening condition where the blood becomes too acidic: ketoacidosis.³ High blood sugar can also damage blood vessels⁴ and this can compromise lung function. (Everyone knows [what COVID-19 can do](#) to lung function).

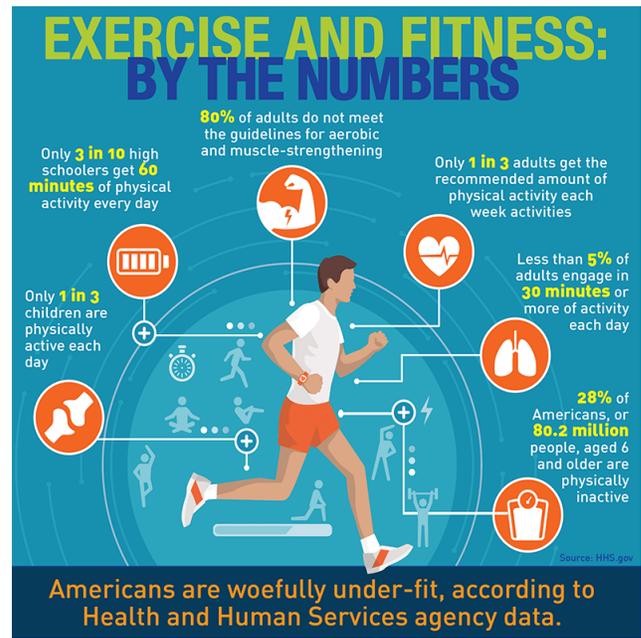
On the other hand, if diabetes is well managed, the risk for serious illness from COVID-19 is similar to that of the general population, according to the American Diabetes Association.⁵

The risks to health (and life) from COVID-19 have convinced me to avoid the Quarantine 15 weight gain-there's just too much at stake. A recent article in the

New York Times put a fine point on the impact of excessive weight on COVID-19 patients. Studies in New York hospitals found that young adults with obesity are more likely to be hospitalized, even if they have no other health problems.⁶ While obese people frequently have other medical problems, excessive weight itself is the most significant risk factor, after older age, for being hospitalized with COVID-19.⁷

For now, COVID-19 is a menace we're living with, but some day we will be able to embrace a new normal. Until then, we have the power to help ourselves and the people we live with and love. Here are the four things I practice to avoid the Quarantine 15:

1. When placing a food order for delivery or visiting a grocery store (with a mask on, please), avoid the candy, snack and ice cream aisles. Fresh, frozen or canned no-sugar-added fruit is a better choice, and your body will thank you for it. I've been working on my weight for the last six months, and while I sometimes miss Hershey's chocolate bars, fruit has been my salvation. If Cheetos or potato chips are your thing, consider hummus and fresh vegetables. Reduced fat cream cheese with whole grain crackers in moderation are a good choice, too. [We reported on 10 healthy lunch and snack ideas here.](#)
2. Think about portions. I love me some mashed potatoes but when whipping up a batch I measure out a portion that won't blow my 1,400-a-day calorie budget. I haven't given up the foods I love-I plan for them. And yes, I eat peanut butter nearly every day.
3. Record your food, weight and exercise. There are many apps that will help you achieve accountability and track how well you're doing.
4. If you miss your fitness center, softball league or bowling team, go for a walk. If you can't go for a walk, do a search on YouTube for yoga or exercise videos. Here's why:



I live in Florida where I can walk three miles a day, but when it's raining or too hot, I exercise over my lunch hour to a YouTube group class that provides a great workout. After my living room fitness session, I try to remember to comb my hair before getting on a conference call with my team.

2020 may feel like a bad dream, but the fact is, this too shall pass. Also, we can't get this time back. Making the most of every day, eating better, exercising and connecting with our loved ones through appropriate social distancing will help us emerge from the other side of this crisis healthier and stronger.

In the meantime, be safe and take care, America.
#TogetherApart ■

¹[CDC](#), "Groups at Higher Risk for Severe Illness"

²[CDC](#), "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report"

³[American Diabetes Association](#), "DKA (Ketoacidosis) & Ketones"

⁴[Science Daily](#), "Discovering How Diabetes Leads to Vascular Disease"

⁵[AARP](#), "How Chronic Conditions Complicate Coronavirus Infections"

⁶[New York Times](#), "Obesity Linked to Severe Coronavirus Disease, Especially for Younger Patients"

⁷[medRxiv](#), "Factors Associated With Hospitalization and Critical Illness Among 4,103 Patients with COVID-19 Disease in New York City"