

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 2: Better Health During COVID-19

April 16, 2020

Summary: James and Cate discuss important ways to stay physically and mentally healthy while practicing social distancing during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Jennifer Goodrich, licensed professional counselor and CEO of Pivot: A Turning Point for Youth, provides valuable insights and useful tips for nurturing your mental health and keeping perspective during unusual and traumatic times. Then, Melissa Oishi, RD/LD, Pediatric Dietitian at OU Physicians, explains the importance of keeping a well-balanced diet and best practices for safe and efficient grocery shopping. Your hosts close out by providing a plethora of valuable resources for quitting tobacco, meal planning, exercising at home, finding food, accessing state resources, homeschooling and more.

[Theme music]

[0:15]

James Tyree: Welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is James Tyree, health communication consultant here at TSET, and I am with Cate Howell. Say hello, Cate.

Cate Howell: Hello, world.

JT: It has been a very interesting world, I've got to say. Since our last podcast last month, so much has changed. We are doing this podcast a little bit differently due to distancing that we'll talk about in a little bit. But here we are discussing for our subject today how to stay healthy, how to promote wellness for ourselves and our families during this time of physical distancing, which of course is important in this needed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic that's going on right now. Started at the very very end of last year, started to gain momentum in January and we started to feel it here in our nation in February and certainly in March. It has affected many thousands of people sadly, so we're taking precautions to be as safe as we possibly can.

CH: It's strange because when we started tracking, really taking very serious measures on locking things down and, you know, shutting down businesses, it happened really around Friday the 13th, which is, you know, an interesting, significant date there. Friday, March 13th was kind of when – and, you know, right around spring break too, so for me as a college student, that was a really interesting time period because a lot of people were traveling and then all of a sudden we had to start taking these measures of social distancing and sheltering in place, or a facsimile of that, right around the time when we're all out and visiting people. I canceled a trip to see my grandmother which is sad, but you know, it was necessary. I'm glad I did.

JT: Yes. Yes, absolutely. I remember it was – I remember on Wednesday March 11th, I remember that, I was at church and I was in the car afterwards and put on the Thunder game and I'm like, "Why are they talking instead of having the game?" and it was

because it was delayed, and we all know what happened after that. The NBA shut down that evening and then it just began a cascade of things, not just day by day but hour by hour. You mentioned Friday the 13th. By the time that happened, it's like so much had already taken place, and it was just so unreal.

So here we are in this situation: a lot of businesses are closed. We are sheltering in place, and we just have to do a lot of things different in order to flatten the curve as we often hear about. But just because we're in the situation, that doesn't put our importance on staying healthy, being healthy for ourselves and our families, on pause. That's still very, very important. And so that's why we will be discussing better health and physical distancing. So very important.

CH: Yeah, especially right now, I would say. The more we can do to improve our immune systems and keep our lungs and our mental and emotional health stable, the better we will be able to see ourselves and our communities through this collective trauma that we're all experiencing.

JT: Exactly. You talked about just staying well and staying healthy. Of course, with TSET, we are very committed to improving our state's health by lowering cancer rates and lowering cardiovascular disease through lowering tobacco use and obesity rates through better nutrition, better physical activity or more physical activity. But it's also important during this time to remember our mental well-being and our emotional state of health as we have talked about. TSET, we are a very committed state partner for better health of all Oklahomans, and so we're going to be discussing different aspects of this, how we can be healthy and well during this very unusual time.

CH: We have some really great interviews lined up to cover these important topics today. Our first guest is Jennifer Goodrich, CEO of [Pivot: A Turning Point for Youth](#). She's also a licensed professional counselor, and she gave us some really, really great tips on mitigating your stress, how to maintain connection while remaining physically distant from our loved ones, but the importance of keeping up that social connection, to finding the difference, and just the importance of, you know, keeping grounded. So I think is challenging for all of us right now. What are our priorities? How do we keep up with a routine? Things like that.

JT: Absolutely.

CH: Our second guest is Melissa Oishi. Would you tell us about her, James?

JT: Yes. Yes, she is a clinical and research of dietitian at OU Health Sciences Center. And so we talked with her quite a bit about how we can continue to eat better, eat nutritiously, whether we live by ourselves or whether we're in a family unit. How to plan for meals, how to shop so that we get the foods that we want and need, but maybe in a time when we're going out to grocery store less often than we used to. She gave us some really, really good advice.

You know, I'm glad that we're going into this because, again, I think these are very topical things to talk about during this time. So let's hear what Jennifer Goodrich had to share for us.

[06:24]

JT: All right. We are here now with Jennifer Goodrich, and welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast. It's so good to have you here. Can you please tell people what it is that you do, where you work and just what your expertise is?

Jennifer Goodrich: Sure. Again, my name is Jennifer Goodrich, and I am the president and CEO of [Pivot: A Turning Point for Youth](#). We actually have 48 years of history of serving young people in our community and we basically address young people that have barriers in their life, and we assess them in five key domains of housing and basic needs, education, employment, permanent connections, so those relationships that are so important, and then health and well-being, so mental health and substance abuse services, physical health, sexual health – just a well-rounded approach to their well-being so that we're sure to serve every capacity that they might present a deficiency in. So our goal is to wrap around them in all the services we provide to be able to meet their needs.

JT: Sounds like a very important organization, you know, that addresses some very important needs for some of us. That's really good.

I wanted to start with a very general question. We are living right now in very unusual times because of the novel coronavirus pandemic. Wanted to ask, just from what you have seen and read and observed, how is social distancing and sheltering in place impacting our general mental health?

JG: I think we all can agree that this is a scary time for all of us, and there's feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, boredom, anger, frustration, sadness, grief, we're isolated, disappointment, all of those sorts of things. Those feelings come from a lot of different places. So we've lost our normalcy, fear of becoming ill ourselves or one of our loved ones. There's economic struggle and impact. And there's different expectations, you know, we've gone from living normalcy to what is our life like now? And all of those things start to cause stress for individuals. And so we're having to learn how to respond to that, and that involves how we think and how we feel about those things.

JT: Absolutely. Are there any parallels between the stressful situations and reactions that we're seeing now and those experienced by the youth and people you work with on a normal basis. And if so, what are the major similarities and differences?

JG: Yeah. What I would say is that it makes their vulnerabilities and disparities even more profound than they are in a regular basis, and it reinforces the idea that resources are limited, and that we come to realize that some have a wider band of what those resources are and some have a vulnerability that's a lot smaller, or even don't have, you know, resources at all.

When someone has a past history of trauma, which most of the young people in the families that we work with do, even if they've developed coping skills, stress like this, stress at any level, but especially at this level, causes them to go into that survival mode, so that fight, flight or freeze, increased risk for different types of abuse to occur. Flight might look like abandoning responsibilities and relationships. Freeze might look like immobilization, so they just shut down and they become depressed. I think the thing that is common amongst it all is we're all feeling stress, it's just a capacity we have to deal with it that's going to be the difference.

JT: It seems like one of the scariest things is the level of uncertainty. We have no idea when this will be better when this will be over, you know?

JG: Yeah.

JT: Like there's no there's no certain end in sight and I would imagine that feeling of what so many of us are dealing with right now is kind of similar to what some of the people that you work with also feel.

JG: I would absolutely agree, and I think what it kind of gets to the heart of it is, when you get in those sorts of situations, if you don't have hope, it becomes very difficult to be able to manage things, and sometimes that's tied to, "How long is this going to last?" and, "If I know when it's going to last, then I know how I can plan for it." When you don't have that, it's like how do you rejuvenate that hope on a daily basis to be able to keep moving forward?

JT: Yeah. That is so true. So what can we do to rekindle that hope and to manage our stress as we try to wade our way through these uncertain times?

JG: So a couple things I would say is not one thing or one way is going to work for everyone, so you have to find what works for you.

I would encourage be limited on comparison and heavy on self-compassion. So if you are on social media, you'll see, even in my own personal life, there's people that all their closets are now clean, and they've got meal planning and all these sorts of things. Well that might work for them, but if I compare myself to that and that's not where I'm at, then I'm going to add on to that mental health issue and that stress that's occurring. So I think we need to limit ourselves on that comparison and be heavy on that self-compassion. Understand that this is new for every single one of us, and so we are all trying to get through it together, but we all can do it in a different way.

Create and follow a daily routine, but be flexible. I think that's important. So you might want it to look one way, but things are changing daily, so having that flexibility.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle. With social distancing – I heard somebody actually say we should call it 'physical distancing,' not social distancing, so that we understand the importance of those relationships that still need to take place. I think that that's important. But in it, if we're all in our homes and there's six people in my family, there's

still going to be times where I need to have solitude. So being sure that we recognize that, and establishing times where we can have that.

Maintaining positive social connections. So it might look different, but still being sure that we have that, that's really important.

Focus on the things you can control. There's a lot of things out of our control right now. If we can focus on the things that we do have control over, we'll be better off.

Making space for disappointment and sadness. There's a lot of grief going on. Seniors are not being able to have the graduation or the prom that they dreamed of. All those sorts of things are occurring, and that we need to understand that that disappointment and sadness is not finite. I think I had a friend that was talking about her daughter missing out on graduation, but then felt bad about it because medical professionals and people that are experiencing COVID-19 are dying, so, "How can I worry about my kid's graduation when there's bigger things in the world?" But we have to honor and accept and understand that all of them carry grief and that we – it's okay. Like, it doesn't mean you can't be sad over here and not sad over there.

And I think also making space for relief and joy. Even though it's a difficult time, it's okay to celebrate some things that are occurring, if someone has a birthday or something is noteworthy, to take that opportunity to celebrate it in the best way that you can. Again, it might look different but still can be honored.

JT: It feels like this is an even more important time to celebrate whatever and whenever we can, you know?

JG: I agree.

JT: Yeah. Wanted to ask you, something that you mentioned, a very important point – one of many, I must say, thank you for your information, Jennifer – but about not comparing ourselves, or not being quick to compare ourselves to what others are doing.

JG: Right.

JT: Are there ways that we can kind of discover for ourselves what works for us to kind of get through this and find positive things going on?

JG: I think some of it is trial and error. You have to try it out and then see how it fits. I think any time you engage in something, you need to listen to yourself. So if it becomes uncomfortable, if it feels forced, if it's not a good match and you can feel it, then it's okay to try something else. So I think that you'll find your way through some of that trial and error and listening to who you are and what you know about yourself. If you're a parent, you might have to help your kid navigate that because kids are, I'm sure, more than ever like, "I don't know what's going on. What's happening?" They don't understand the same seriousness often times, why it's important to be doing what we're doing. All they know is, "I don't get to go see my friends. I don't get to have my

birthday party,” that sort of thing. So if you're a parent, it's not only navigating your own, but it's also navigating other people in your household and your connections, that sort of thing.

JT: Absolutely.

JG: I think the other thing is not to be judgmental. That also comes with comparison. I was in the grocery store recently – we run a shelter and we also have a food pantry, so we work with a lot of young people who are living unaccompanied that have no family or parental support, and somebody had made a donation, and so I went to the store and I was gathering all that I could so I had, you know – I didn't take toilet paper, but I did take a lot of microwavable meals and that sort of thing, so my cart was pretty full. Somebody looked at me and sneered at me, and I just thought, “Okay, well, first of all, you don't understand who I'm buying this for.” But it was a really good reminder to me that I don't know what other people are doing either. So if their cart is full, perhaps they're buying it for every older person in their neighborhood. So I think that we need to be kind to one another when it comes to that as well.

JT: That's such a good point. Such a good point for us all to remember. Thank you.

Wanted to ask, during this time, what is the importance of maintaining structure and routine when things seemed to be kind of upended a little bit?

JG: I think it's extremely important. Routine can provide comfort, familiarity, predictability. Again, especially for kids, I think it's really important if you can maintain whatever that looks like. It might not be their regular, the old normal. It might be a new normal. But if you can establish it, it gives that message that, even in the chaos, I can feel safe and I can count on some things in my life. Again, it might look different now than it did before, but I really – it can provide that safety.

JT: Well, as you know, we are with TSET, and we deal with tobacco control, tobacco issues, trying to lower serious health problems caused by tobacco and obesity. And of course, during this time a lot of people, you know, they may feel stressed and may turn to tobacco or some other substance, and most people already know that these things are not, you know, particularly good for you, but it's – these are very, very stressful times. What can you say on this particular topic that people may not already realize?

JG: In those dynamics, I think it gets to some of the fundamental beliefs on what treatment is for when we utilize substances, whether it's food, tobacco, alcohol, whatever it is to handle stress, you know, a lot of the model is we have to live – we need to be present, live in the moment, take it day by day. But when everything around you is telling you prepare two weeks out, we don't know what's going to happen on April 30th, it might be Memorial Day, those sorts of things, it starts to take that away from us.

I also think it goes back to that hope – hope piece, right? So if all I have is today, then I might as well enjoy today. If I can't handle today, I know that if I utilize these different coping mechanisms, even though I know they're not good for me, at least I know I can

control that for today. I think it puts people in a position where that's where they're at. So they go ahead and engage in those behaviors and then it feels better for the moment, but it doesn't help them get better in the long run. It doesn't change the overall dynamic.

So I think it goes back to that hope and looking for the longer-term vision, and I think it's also a reminder that with any kind of behavior, whether it's food, tobacco, alcohol, learning to say nice things to other people, that we – there are times that relapse is part of that and that we need to be kind to our self especially in those moments and know that even if that happened today, it doesn't mean tomorrow we can't make a different choice.

JT: Yes, good point. Yeah, absolutely. Can you share maybe a couple of strategies that could be helpful for people of any age, younger, older, what have you, that we can build that hope within us, things that we can do to basically mitigate that stress in a positive way and raise that hope that helps us over the long haul?

JG: I think the number one thing that makes the biggest difference is to have that support system. So who is the person you went to before? Who's the person you can go to now? If you don't have that person, who can I reach out to to start to build that support system? But I think that's the number one essential thing, especially in the time where we do have to be physically distant, we have to find a way where we can still have that connection. So I think, first and foremost, that is the number one thing that needs to happen. I think beyond that, it's looking at what are those other things, those other behaviors that can help me build those coping skills? So again, that's going to look different for other people. So, is it exercising? Is it taking a walk? Is it, again, going hour to hour instead of day by day?

JT: Right, very good. Are there some online or other type of resources, mental health resources that people can go to, or ideas and tips and places to find help during this time?

JG: Yeah, many organizations, Pivot included, community mental health centers, have taken on telehealth. There's also been some relaxing in the guidelines of even insurance companies and all that sort of thing to be able to provide telehealth, also not just if you can video it, but also through the telephone. So there's a lot of opportunity for people to be reaching out and accessing. Lots of good information on the internet, from websites that are based from educational entities as well as government, those sorts of things, on other kinds of resources available in Oklahoma City.

[211](#) is a great resource, if you have a specific need, to call up. A lot of the stress is also occurring because people are losing their jobs. They don't have access to basic needs, that sort of thing. There's a lot of other opportunities to get connection and assistance in those areas, which can decrease the stress and other areas if they can get those needs taken care of, whether that's with unemployment or the new guidelines on not being able to be evicted, so at least they know their space is available. Just lots of different opportunities at this point.

JT: Very good. Those are some very, very good words to think of. So many out there. You mentioned [211](#), which is a fantastic resource of all kinds, absolutely. Jennifer, is there anything else that you would like to mention that we haven't addressed yet that could just help people, you know, get through this time and cope and have that hope?

JG: I'd like to share something I actually read online and it said, "We need to stop trying to carry out everything online. Some things just need to be let go. Flattening the curve also involves lowering the bar and prioritizing well-being above productivity."

JT: That's so helpful. And you have been so helpful, Jennifer. Thank you so much for your time. We appreciate you big time.

JG: It's been a pleasure.

[23:25]

JT: Wow, those were some very excellent comments, words and concepts that we can really take to heart as we try to navigate this unusual time, Cate.

CH: Yeah, I was so glad that we were able to speak with her because she provides such an amazing essential service for our youth, but also her experience as a counselor is really coming in handy right now. And yeah, she made a couple of profound statements.

JT: I like what she had to say about limiting our comparisons, but being heavy on self-compassion, not you know, not necessarily how – it's not the greatest thing to always compare ourselves and what we're doing or what we're not doing compared to what we see others on Facebook or in conversations. We have our own way of getting through this and finding out what works best for us, you know?

CH: Yeah, it's been really interesting on my social media. There's kind of like an ideological war happening between different groups of people. There's one group that's kind of like this cult of productivity, you know, they're like, "Use this as an opportunity to take up a new hobby, learn a new language," basically just treating this like it's some kind of sabbatical or, you know, type of event instead of what it is, which is an ever-adapting, evolving, difficult, painful situation for people.

But then there's another group of people who are like, "No, we reject that, you do what you need to do to keep yourself healthy and keep yourself and your family strong and united, you know, however that looks to you." But this whole myth – and I love that Jennifer brought that up, you know, so strongly, hammered that point home – productivity and the metrics for that are changing now.

JT: Yeah. You know, for some people, you know, learning that new language or taking on some major task, this is a good time for them. That does work for them. And if it does, then more power to you, go for it, take advantage of this opportunity. But if that's not you, then don't worry about it. Find your own group, you know? Very, very important. And so, very good, good words to think about. And also what she mentioned about

behaviors, things that we do, such as, you know – this is a very stressful time. It could be tempting to use tobacco or some other substance in order to get through this, but having that hope, which helps us to think more long-term instead of what's happening right now, very important.

You know, we also – we very much appreciate what Jennifer had to say, and of course, there are many other resources out there that can help us cope to help us manage stress, to help us to get through this very unusual time. Of course, we are big fans of the [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) site because we know that is a very, very credible source. The CDC is where we often turn to for guidance for science and things along those lines, and that website has a lot of resources on a number of things regarding coronavirus, but including, this includes how to deal with stress and coping, and I would absolutely recommend checking that out. It has information on what to do for yourselves, for your families, and it's just very, very helpful.

CH: Yeah, and we'll include all the links that we've mentioned in the description for the podcast as well, so if you're listening and you're like, "Wow, that sounds great, I'd love to check that out," well, you can go just to the description of this podcast and we'll have everything listed there for you.

JT: Exactly. You know, one thing that Jennifer mentioned, and we'll hear later on from Melissa, is there are so many resources out there, not only online but also tele-sources in which you're able to call in and actually have face-to-face meetings over the computer, you know. And when reaching out for help, no matter what type of help that you need, these resources really are out there for us. One remarkable resource, of course, that we often talk about here at TSET is the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline. And we're happy to mention that the helpline has a very new look that was just unveiled just this month, and it looks fantastic. It's very easy to navigate. We encourage you to go there to [OKHelpline.com](https://www.okhelpline.com) and check it out. It looks really nice.

But you know, as mentioned, sometimes people use tobacco in order to calm down, to manage stress. It's something that we can certainly be empathetic about because these are very difficult times. But we also know that tobacco use, while it's always dangerous, it really is, you know, more so during this pandemic going on.

CH: Yeah, there's experts coming forward now urging people to quit smoking and vaping as well. I mean, we already saw the vaping illness epidemic, the EVALI, the vaping lung illness that was going on. If you – that was only a few months ago. Now, vaping is different from tobacco because vaping affects the entire lung, which is also what COVID-19 does; it impacts the entire lung. Experts have come forward in certain places, in New York particularly, and they're asking not only for smokers to quit smoking, but for Big Tobacco producers to [quit making their products](#) because they're actively harming people in the midst of this pandemic and making it more likely to contract really serious symptoms.

JT: Yeah, that's true. You know, I found [this](#) at the American Lung Association website. The association's chief medical officer Albert Rizzo, he had a blog on their site and he talked about how we know that COVID-19 is a very, very aggressive virus. It's very, very

contagious. It affects our lungs and while with some people, they have no to mild symptoms, when it's severe, it is very severe because it really blocks your airways in your lungs. Dr. Rizzo said that, "COVID-19 is a lung infection that aggressively attacks the lungs and even leaves lung cells and tissues dead. While it's important to prevent getting COVID-19 in the first place, it's also essential that we do all we can to keep our lungs healthy to avoid the worst effects of the disease," which of course goes back to the tobacco and the vaping that you were talking about, Cate. When you have these substances, these harmful chemicals in your lungs that are already negatively impacting your lungs, and then you have the threat of this virus, it can be extremely dangerous.

CH: I mean, it's so difficult to quit when you are addicted, but if you ever had that thought of "Man, maybe I should quit," let this now be the incentive. Let this be the sign from the universe. Because, you know, this is the perfect time to quit. And we're seeing a lot of people go out and stockpile cigarettes because they're – they're trying to shelter in place, and so they want to make sure they have enough, but let me just say that that is not going to help you get through this, and we need to really be focusing on keeping your lungs strong and healthy. One way to do that, you know, if you're ready to make that step, we have lots of resources to help you on at [OKHelpline.com](https://www.okhelpline.com). Like James said, we have this brand new website, looks great. You can order a –

JT: It really does.

CH: You can order a free starter kit that has a two-week supply of patches, gums, lozenges, totally free. And we'll also have coaching for you via text or phone call or web chat, and a guide, like a printout guide or downloadable guide that you can have that will give you tips on how to quit.

In moments of stress, we often reach to our substances to help us cope, and one thing that, you know, it sounds cheesy maybe, but meditation is a really, really good alternative here, and I will link a [New York Times article](#) that has a really, really detailed, thorough, helpful guide on what meditation is, what to expect, how to build up a habit, and all the ways it physically benefits you. There is ample evidence to suggest physical bodily benefits of meditation.

JT: Absolutely. So again, if you are very interested, please check out our very new sharp-looking website. [OKHelpline.com](https://www.okhelpline.com) or 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

Hey, Cate?

CH: Yes, James?

JT: Have you been to the grocery store lately?

CH [laughs] I went to Homeland the other day and my anxiety was off the charts. It was nerve-wracking going through. And there were so many things that were out of stock. No toilet paper anywhere. Nothing.

JT: Yes.

CH: Yeah, it's bad.

JT: It is wild. You know, I went there – last couple times I went, I expected that with the toilet paper and such, but there are even different food items, you know, some types of breads, some types of staples and things that – it was slim pickings, either very little there or none at all, like wow, it is really, really something.

So yeah, grocery shopping during this time has really looked different of late, you know? And of course, our eating habits are really different too, because, of course, so many of us are working from home now instead of at the office; the kids are home from school; college students are off campus now; and so our eating and nutrition dynamics have changed so much, and of course, we also have to think about our food budget. A lot of people are laid off or they have their hours cut, you know? And so there's not as much money to go out and buy groceries.

So we talked about this and a few other topics with Melissa Oishi, who is the clinical and research dietician at OU Health Sciences Center, and I think that you and everyone else out there, all of our listeners, would be very interested to hear what she has to say.

[35:20]

JT: Hello, this is James Tyree, and we are here today with Melissa Oishi. Welcome to the podcast, and can you tell us a little bit about what you do at the Health Sciences Center with nutrition and diet?

Melissa Oishi: Sure, yeah. So I'm Melissa Oishi. I'm a registered dietician. I work for the OU HSC here in Oklahoma City. What I do is I see kids and their families in a general pediatric clinic here. And so what we work on is, you know, just healthy habits for life, learning about nutrition and how it affects the body, how it can really help or hurt your performance, and just all aspects of health. And then the other part of my job is I'm the dietitian for Healthy Future. So we work specifically with children with obesity, with their families and those children to help them to kind of flow that curve of growth. Also, you know, looking at healthy habits for life.

JT: Wow, that is great. That is really, really good. You know, under normal circumstances, people try to figure out how to eat well because we're always on the go and have super busy schedules, but now during this time when we're all sheltering and staying at home, it's forcing many of us that kind of stop and not be on the go so much. So what kind of eating and nutritional challenges can people face during this very different time that you are seeing?

MO: Sure, yeah. So I would say we're kind of getting towards the first little hurdle of what's going on here, and that first little part was all that panic buying, right? So people were going out to the stores and buying anything and everything that they can get their hands

on. Well, this kind of leaves, you know, slim pickings for people who were maybe late to the game or didn't have the money to go right then. So that's kind of the first hurdle was the slim pickings and getting what you can get to survive basically. But it's looking the grocery stores are kind of getting over that hump and able to restock. So now we're kind of getting back to that normal choices that we would normally have.

Now, with those normal choices, what I would suggest for people, since we're doing this shelter-in-place and, you know, you really shouldn't be going out to the grocery store every other day to pick up your fresh fruits, vegetables, things like that, so kind of being strategic in the things that you're buying. So, buying things that are shelf-stable, buying things that don't go bad fast. So things like – you're going to get bacon and eggs and oats and dried beans, utilizing the frozen vegetables and fruit, utilizing the canned vegetable bin, and fruits, so when you're buying cans, though, making sure that you're rinsing those vegetables and not buying the fruits in the syrup, stuff like that. And then, you know, like potatoes and things like that that don't go bad as fast.

JT: Okay. So it sounds like the grocery shopping is pretty similar to what we would normally do, but finding nutritious items that will stay longer so that we don't have to go more often.

MO: Exactly, and then also kind of paying attention to focusing on those nutrient-dense foods and skipping over those foods that are more processed, that don't have as much nutrients. So maybe skipping over those cookies and those crackers so you can buy less food items and have more nutrition.

JT: All right. That sounds good. I know my daughter, you know, she likes those – just as an example, she likes those dried banana chips that she thinks are really tasty and could still be very nutritious. Any other specific ideas that might come to mind?

MO: Yeah, so any of those, you know, dried fruit, trail mixes are great for snacks, too. You know, a little bit goes a long way with those types of things, so you can kind of keep those stocked in your home for a long time. Other things, you know, Greek yogurt. You could get them in the big tubs; those last for quite a while. And then also fruits and vegetables. If you have frozen fruit, make a little smoothie there for snacks for the kids.

JT: Oh, that's a good idea.

MO: [laughs]

JT: Now, a lot of us tend to eat when we are stressed or if we are bored. I know I can, and of course nowadays, there's a lot of stress and there can be a lot of boredom going on. So do you have any words of advice to help us with handling those situations?

MO: Yes, for sure. That's actually something that I spend a lot of time talking to my families, just normally actually, because a lot of times on the weekend kids are bored and they want to graze and eat all the time. So right now obviously, we're all at home, we're all kind of bored, so it's so easy to just go in the kitchen and take a peek and see what's

there. The best thing that I can do to help with that is to create a meal plan, a meal schedule, you know, so getting the kids up at the time that they normally would for school, right? So then they're having breakfast kind of at that normal time and then having that lunchtime when they normally would have lunch, and then having us a set snack time. That's kind of the biggest key there, is in the afternoons are usually when people are going around and grazing. So making sure that you have a set time to have that one snack in the afternoon, have them sit at the table there, because that kind of just helps to calm everything down and helps with more mindful eating; and then also making sure that you're having a quality snack. So we kind of already talked about having those nutrient dense foods in the house. So one little tip that I give parents is to make sure that you're using at least two different food groups with one of them being a fruit or vegetable, and that's to help get that fiber in those kids to help them feel full and to tide them over until dinnertime, and dinnertime, again, should be trying to find to have that set time.

JT: Wow, that's some good advice there, too. You work with families, and many of us are in families. Some people, you know, they're living by themselves. And so I know that with those folks, they may not meal plan as much, or things along those lines. Any advice for people who just eat for themselves and plan for themselves?

CH: Yeah, so making leftovers and making larger batches is perfectly acceptable and a great thing to utilize. So, you know, maybe you're cooking away three times a week and you're saving those leftovers, so you could put those in the fridge for up to three five days, or you can even freeze them and those can stay in the freezer and you'll have meals left over that you could just eat up for months.

JT: Yeah, that would help not only with the planning but in not having to go to the store quite as often, too. That's like doubly good

MO: Right, exactly. Exactly. And another thing that will also help to, you know, kind of keep you from going to the store so often is to really sit down before you go to the store and look in your pantry and look in your fridge and freezer, and then make a list of the things that you need for, you know, maybe two weeks. And so thinking about the types of meals or foods that you would like to have for the next few weeks, and then making that list and sticking to that list when you're going grocery shopping, because the faster that you could get your grocery shopping in, that's the less exposure you're going to have, so kind of being quick about it is going to be helpful, too.

JT: Right. Yeah, good, good advice. I wanted to ask you whether you have seen or encountered any silver linings, so to speak. You know, we're in a very tough situation, but have you seen any positive outcomes from a nutritional aspect, like maybe families who are spending more time together and doing something in the kitchen or, as you mentioned, meal planning?

MO: You know, I'm kind of one of those people that always look for the silver lining of things. So I have a pretty good list here of things that are –

JT: There you go.

MO: – actually pretty good. So what you said, you know, spending more time with family. Normally, you know, with a busy, busy schedule, busy lives, families aren't able to sit down for breakfast and lunch, but now they can, and they can spend that time with their kids or their loved ones. So multiple times, to have that interaction, sitting down at the table is a huge silver lining. I think it really helps with mindful eating and just connecting. Another silver lining, you know, we're having more time to be able to be in the kitchen, so maybe we try some new recipes at this time, you know, using things that we don't normally. A lot of times, we don't think about using dried beans and frozen vegetables and things like that, so how does that work with your family? And then getting the kids in there. A lot of times kids are busy, but since they're at home a lot, they're going to be taking you up on that offer to do anything out of the ordinary. So if they're in the kitchen –

JT: Yes.

MO: – they're going to be happy doing something exciting, right? So that's kind of a nice, happy thing. And then, again, we kind of touched on this, we have more time to prep and think about what we're going to be eating. So you're stuck at home rather than watch, you know, that third Netflix show, maybe you spend that time in the kitchen looking at recipes or things that you could be doing for the next week.

JT: Very good. I guess you know about that third Netflix show, huh? [laughs]

MO: Oh yes, oh yes. [laughs]

JT: Very good. [laughs]

Now on the other hand, conversely, there are a lot of people who are struggling even more than usual to get proper nutrition. Because, you know, there are a lot of people who've been laid off, who've had their hours cut, kids who normally get free meals at schools that aren't. Do you know of any ideas or resources to help people through these tough situations?

MO: Yes. Fortunately, you know, Oklahoma has been pretty great about getting with their schools and everything and getting all that in place. So for kids and school lunches and breakfasts, they are offering free meals to all kids, breakfast and lunch, and you can just drive up to the location and you can pick it up. So I've actually come up with a list, let's see, it's – News 9 has created a [full list](#) of all the Oklahoma districts that have where you can pick those up. And so the Food and Nutrition Services as part of the USDA has really utilized the flexibilities and waivers to be able to get all these meals out to all these kids. So that's great. Another thing, \$500 million has been allocated to WIC to increase – for the increases in program participation so that they have the resources that they need to help those people. [SNAP](#) has also extended deadlines to re-enroll, and they're pretty much expediting the interview process so that people can get accepted quicker. And then there's \$400 million additions to the food banks so that people can get the

Emergency Food Assistance Program so that they can supply food banks and help those families. So if you're interested in any of that you can go to [FNS.USDA.gov](https://www.fns.usda.gov), and it kind of tells you all about all the waivers and flexibilities that they've been utilizing during this time.

JT: Well, that's very helpful. That site again was F, as in Frank, N-S.USDA.gov.

MO: Correct.

JT: Oh good. Good, good. Thanks for sharing that with us. And finally, is there anything else that you would like to mention that we haven't touched on yet?

MO: You know, I'll just say wash your hands, stay inside. It sounds like, you know, we're trying to get that curve to go down, and so it sounds like you're doing a pretty good job of it. We could always do better. And then, take advantage of the telemedicine that is being put out right now. So if you need to talk to your PCP, you know, nutrition services are in on that, so we can always talk to you via – it's like Skype basically. You just have it – you could do it on your phone. It's the easiest thing to just get connected. If you need resources or anything like that, just try to get in and get connected.

JT: Good words of advice. Well, Melissa, we very much thank you for your time. We thank you for your insights and things that you've shared with us. We wish you all the best going forward and, gosh, thank you so much.

MO: Thank you for having me.

[47:53]

JT: Wow, so what did you think of her interview, Cate?

CH: I was taking notes the entire time honestly. Cooking in big batches is something that I have been doing lately with my little – I live in an efficiency apartment, you know, so I don't have a whole lot of kitchen going on, but I have a crock pot. I have a little baby crock pot, and so I've been making some stuff that's been lasting me for several days in a row. That's been a huge lifesaver for me.

JT: You know, I asked her about eating when you're stressed, eating when you're bored, and that, along with other topics, you know, she mentioned structure and planning even for those snacks can be pretty helpful. It's helpful in terms of going to the grocery store during this very interesting time. It's helpful for avoiding those extra calories that could be junk food, how to avoid that with the structure, the planning, and just taking an inventory of what we have in our pantry, in our refrigerator. And developing meal plans, but also grocery lists so that we're able, when we do go out to go shopping, that is very strategic. We get all the stuff that we want and need for ourselves and our families, and so that way, you make better choices in the foods you buy and you don't have to go to the store quite as often, which is very helpful during this time.

CH: Yeah, and when you do go to the store have a solid plan so you can execute it in a timely fashion and limit your exposure. That, I thought, was a really key thing. You know, you don't want to be –Normally, like, I don't know about you, but I when I go grocery shopping, you know, I'll wander around and browse. "Do I want this or do I want that?" and be very like, you know, not in a huge hurry, it's not urgent to get in and out. But right now, I don't want to spend any time in there that I don't have to. So having a plan, like being able to go, "Okay, this is from the produce section. This is what kind of greens I need. This is..." you know. That, I think, will be helpful, too.

JT: Yes, yes indeed. So we want to let you know, of course, there are, just like we discussed with stress and coping, and just as we discussed with tobacco, there are many places that have helpful information, but we at TSET, we do as well in terms of better nutrition and physical activity. We cannot recommend enough ShapeYourFutureOK.com. The Shape Your Future program is about helping Oklahomans to eat better, move more and to live tobacco-free, and it has a wealth of information and tips to help us eat and move around during this time. So again, that's ShapeYourFutureOK.com. There's one page, it says right there, 'Eat healthy and be active anywhere,' and then it says right below, "It is hard to make healthy choices because I don't live close to a supermarket or gym," or maybe if you're staying inside, you know, to avoid those places, you can still move around. There is a sheet there, some information of different exercise ideas, things that you can do at home to move around to be active, and very, very fun ways as well. There is a deal of [Ten Healthy Ways to Stretch Your Dollar](http://TenHealthyWaysToStretchYourDollar.com). So many things to check out at ShapeYourFutureOK.com.

CH: Yeah, I particularly love how they take into consideration people of all demographics when it comes to time constraints, being able to make recipes that are still healthy but easy and quick, things that are budget friendly. If you're not working with a lot of resources, which a lot of us aren't right now, you know, you can still make these healthy choices, and they provide really great guidelines for you to do that. Also meal planning; they have little grocery lists that, on the backside, they have meal plans for the week. So it's a really, really great resource. For physical activity as well, they have some really great guidelines. So they say that adults need at least 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week. So that's what we should be shooting for as adults right now, somehow. Managing to get –

JT: That's true.

CH: [laughs] – 30 minutes of physical activity five days per week, and kids need 60 minutes every day. That can be a tall order, but they have some ideas, you know, like they can be broken up into ten minute chunks throughout the day. Basically get your heart rate up, get your body moving 10 minutes, three times a day for adults, or for kids, have them around in circles in the yard, or – they have better ideas than that.

JT: Yes. It has ideas of how to use just common household items, towels, cans of food, anything, how to use those to help you, to help anyone to be physically active. And so those tricks are also available ShapeYourFutureOK.com.

And you're right, you know, it could be challenging when you're sheltering in place. I have a smart phone that keeps track of my steps and how many minutes that I'm being physically active, and, I tell you, the last two weeks, it had been lower than normal. But it also compares me with other men using this particular brand, and I feel bad about mine being lower than normal, but compared to others, all around the place, they're way lower. I mean way lower. Normally, nationally in my average 50 minutes per day and they're down to like 30 minutes a day because people are, you know, they're inside so much more. So yeah, it's very important to do what we can whether we are indoors or in our backyards, and even though we cannot take advantage of public facilities and equipment right now, we can still walk, we can still jog, take bike rides while practicing safe and responsible physical distancing.

CH: Also, you know, so we have Shape Your Future, which is great and has a lots of things you can do right here at home and ways you can include your kids and just, like, basic guidelines. We also have the YMCA. They have a whole library now of on-demand workout videos that are open to the public. You don't have to be a member of the YMCA. You just go to YMCA360.org and it has all these videos. So really no excuse. [laughs]

JT: Exactly right. You know, we really want to let everyone know – you probably know about this already, but just making sure you do, about state resources to help you get all the information that you need. There is coronavirus.health.ok.gov that gives you all of the information, in terms of like the latest stats here in Oklahoma, what's happening with the novel coronavirus, and breaks it down by a county and by gender and things along those lines. So when you need to know about the actual pandemic and the state, there's that. However, for resources, there is also covidresources.ok.gov. When you go there, there is a plethora of information or resources that can help individuals and families during this time. It includes social services, business services, consumer protection, all kinds of things. Have you visited that website?

CH: I have. I'm really impressed. It's basically a one-stop shop for any kind of government service you can think of. It's got your needs for unemployment, disability, child support, food stamps. It's got your election resources, like requesting an absentee ballot, which is going to be probably a big deal coming up. If you need birth and death certificates, if you need to renew your driver's license – I just renewed my driver's license online for the first time. Brand new. But they also have a symptom checker intake form where, if you feel like you might be experiencing symptoms and you're not sure if you need monitoring or not, you can literally fill out a form and they will give you advice in return. Not sure what the turnaround time is on that because I'm sure they're pretty overloaded, but it's there for you.

JT: It's there.

CH: Yeah, exactly. And then of course, they have the helpline, [211](tel:211) or [877-215-8336](tel:877-215-8336), for if you're having any kind of coronavirus related concerns and you're looking to get some guidance from the state health department.

JT: Yeah, it is a wonderful resource, so please check it out: covidresources.ok.gov. So there is a lot of help out there, a lot of resources that people can turn to. In some ways, we feel physically isolated because we just have to keep our distance, and that's very important. And we're not living the lives that we normally do, but we truly are in this together with the resources that we have, by our ability to reach out to our own network, you know, of friends and family, workmates, colleagues, wonderful people who are looking out for us and our community. It really is helpful during this time.

CH: Yeah, most definitely. There's things you can do, and if you're feeling like you're struggling and you're feeling tempted to abuse substances or you're worried about somebody, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services helpline, hotline, is [1-800-985-5990](tel:1-800-985-5990) or you can text talk with us to 66746.

But there's also a lots of resources out there for food. If you're struggling with food insecurity, the Regional Food Bank has resources on their website at regionalfoodbank.org. There's a list of available resources, including food pantries and resources for getting assistance with your prescriptions if you need help in that area. And lots of public schools are serving [meals for children](#). I will link to that.

There's also, you know, James, homeschooling and how to keep your kids learning and occupied at home. Lots of resources available for that. Shape Your Future actually has some good resources. They link to [CATCH.org](https://catch.org) where there's free online classes and materials regarding nutrition and physical fitness. And OETA has initiated a [distance learning programming schedule](#). So if you got your TV and your antenna, you can turn on OETA and they've got a programming schedule with educational television sources. And the state department of education has a [thorough list](#) and things to consider with distance learning. So we'll include all those links in the description.

JT: Very good, very good. But we want to wrap up by mentioning that, even though our times are different right now, that one of the things that remain the same is the importance to stay healthy in all aspects, and we at TSET, even though our office in Oklahoma city is closed, our staff and our grantees throughout the state remain on the job, and we are definitely committed to improving the health of all of Oklahomans in our state. We are here with you. We are here for you, and that will not change.

So we want to say thank you for tuning in. Thank you for listening. We hope that you have enjoyed this podcast and that you will keep the points in mind, and we invite you to join us again next time. But until then, we wish you peace –

CH: – and Better Health.

[Theme music]

[1:01:08]