

Got questions about social distancing?

LONDON: As the United States experiences widespread school closures and governmental orders to close public places that attract crowds, you're likely to hear the term "social distancing" several times a day.

Social distancing includes several measures that can slow down the spread of COVID-19 to prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed with sick individuals. If the novel coronavirus is allowed to spread, unchecked by social distancing, there might not be enough beds in intensive care units for all the people that need them.

"Social distancing is a complicated way of saying stay away from people, and the microbial residue that people might have accidentally left behind," said Malia Jones, a social epidemiologist at the University of Wisconsin in Madison who studies how people's behaviors contribute to outbreaks of infectious disease.

"Since the virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from person to person through physically close social contacts, the best approach to prevention we have right now is to keep people from being in close contact as much as

possible," she explained.

"I've been calling social distancing 'cocooning' to promote the idea that you should be at home in a safe harbor with your family," Jones said.

It's critical that everyone practices social distancing, not just those who are sick, Jones told Healthline. This can help vulnerable populations, like older adults, from getting the virus. Due to delays in testing and the ability for someone to have and spread COVID-19, even if they appear healthy, it's currently impossible to know who has it.

"Social distancing is a responsibility that individuals take on to make sure they're not the vector of disease and to break the chain of transmission," said May Chu, PhD, a clinical professor in the department of epidemiology at the Colorado School of Public Health in Aurora, Colorado.

How to practice social distancing Stay home

"In a nutshell, stay at home except for essential errands," Jones stated.

This goes for those who feel healthy, too. "Many cases are very mild or asymptomatic. But you can still give it to someone else even if you don't feel



sick yet," she said.

Avoid all crowded places or events

Cancel any gatherings that involve members outside your household or "cocoon." It's possible that another household, such as that of immediate family, are also part of your small circle. If so, everyone in the cocoon needs

to avoid social contact outside this circle and maintain a high level of personal hygiene.

Stay 3 to 6 feet away from people outside of your own family

"The recommendation is to be 3 to 6 feet away from other people, and to preferably be outside," where transmis-

sion risk is lower, said Thomas Jaenisch, PhD, an infectious disease epidemiologist and associate professor at the Colorado School of Public Health. While 3 to 6 feet is distant enough if it's for a minute or so, "If you're in a closed room and have a meeting for an hour, that's a different story" and should be avoided, Jaenisch said.

Wash your hands often for 20 seconds, and don't share items with people outside your cocoon.

"To avoid getting anything [such as the virus] that was sneezed onto a table or door handle onto your hands, and then ultimately into your mouth and nose, wash your hands often, especially before you eat and as soon as you get home from being outside," Jones said.

Do I need to practice social distancing if I'm symptom-free?

We asked experts to clarify exactly how to practice social distancing in common scenarios to avoid spreading or contracting COVID-19. For some situations, experts have clear answers. But for others, the science isn't yet available, so it's responsible to err on the side of greater caution.

Overall, experts agreed the situations below were generally not essential. "All of these things, like going to the gym, riding public transportation — all of that fuels the epidemic," Jaenisch said.

Can I schedule play dates for my kids?

"Keep your children home from school, and don't let them mix with other kids outside your cocoon. School closures are especially important because even though children aren't at particularly high risk for getting sick from COVID-19, they can still be carriers [and spread illness]," Jones explained.

Can I go to restaurants and bars?

Many cities already have restrictions in place. "If there's a government request to [stop going to these establishments] for high concern, we should all follow those rules and not go. It's not prudent," Chu said.

If it's not mandated yet, but you can anticipate [the mandate] coming, I wouldn't go just to [dine out] one more time before everything closes. If you do dine out for whatever reason, it is safest to sit outside and ensure a lot of space between you and others. —AFP

12 of the best non-perishable foods



NEW YORK: Non-perishable foods, such as canned goods and dried fruit, have a long shelf life and don't require refrigeration to keep them from spoiling. Instead, they can be stored at room temperature, such as in a pantry or cabinet (1).

They're not only standard kitchen items but also favored by backpackers and campers who can't bring perishable foods like fresh meats, dairy, and vegetables on the trail. What's more, non-perishable goods are essential in emergency situations and favored by charitable organizations that feed or give groceries to people facing homelessness or food insecurity. Although some items like boxed macaroni and cheese are packed with preservatives and other unhealthy ingredients, quite a few nutritious non-perishable foods are available.

Here are 12 of the healthiest non-perishable foods.

1. Dried and canned beans

With a long shelf life and high nutrient content, dried and canned beans are smart non-perishable food choices. Canned beans can be kept at room temperature for 2–5 years while dried beans can last 10 or more years, depending on the packaging (1).

In fact, one study found that pinto beans stored up to 30 years were considered edible by 80% of people on an emergency food use panel (2).

Beans are an excellent source of fiber, plant-based protein, magnesium, B vitamins, manganese, iron, phosphorus, zinc, and copper. What's more, they pair well with most foods and make hearty additions to soups, grain dishes, and salads (3Trusted Source).

2. Nut butters

Nut butters are creamy, nutrient-dense, and delicious.

Although storage temperatures can affect shelf life, commercial peanut butter keeps for up to 9 months at room temperature. Natural peanut butter, which does not contain preservatives, lasts up to 3 months at 50°F (10°C) and only 1 month at 77°F (25°C) (4, 5Trusted Source). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), almond butter keeps for up to 1 year at room temperature while cashew butter keeps up to 3 months (6). Nut butters are a rich source of healthy fats, protein, vitamins, minerals, and powerful plant compounds, including phenolic antioxidants, which are compounds that protect your body against oxidative stress and damage by un-

Coffee can make you more focused, but it probably won't make you more creative

NEW YORK: Your morning cup of coffee can increase your ability to focus and problem-solve, but it probably has no significant impact on creativity.

That's the conclusion of a study published this week.

In the research, 80 participants were given either a 200-milligram caffeine pill, which is equivalent to one cup of strong coffee, or a placebo.

The stimulant's effects on convergent (problem-solving) and divergent (idea-generating) thinking, working memory, and mood were tested.

Caffeine affected convergent thinking but not divergent thinking, the researchers reported.

It didn't significantly affect working memory, although researchers reported that participants felt less sad.

Headline Challenges

Curious about mindful eating? We can give you a taste.

Are you ready to give mindful eating a shot? Our nutrition newsletter can help you try it. Take the Mindful Eating Challenge and learn how to create lasting, healthy habits around food.

Kristin Kirkpatrick, MS, RDN, author of "Skinny Liver," says she isn't surprised by the study's findings.

"Previous studies did not find a link to creativity in the past," she told Healthline. "Creativity is so very personal, though interesting, I'm not sure what the link would be to have caffeine impact that."

It was surprising to Andy De Santis, a registered dietitian and weight loss specialist. "I've written and looked into the evidence on caffeine on numerous occasions, and my understanding of the best available science was always that, while caffeine can offer enhanced attention and focus, there is much less convincing evidence it's going to make you better at making tough decisions or carrying out more complex tasks," he told Healthline.

"For me, based on what I've seen previously, it's unsurprising that creativity falls into that second category, and that's not to say this study definitively closes the book on caffeine and creativity either," De Santis added.

Be cautious with caffeine

The study was conducted with the equivalent of just one cup of strongly brewed coffee. Healthline spoke with experts to determine whether a certain amount of caffeine in the diet starts having an inverse impact.



"Yes, absolutely," says De Santis. "There is something known as the Yerkes-Dodson law. It was surprising to Andy De Santis, a registered dietitian and weight loss specialist. "I've written and looked into the evidence on caffeine on numerous occasions, and my understanding of the best available science was always that, while caffeine can offer enhanced attention and focus, there is much less convincing evidence it's going to make you better at making tough decisions or carrying out more complex tasks," he told Healthline, which essentially says that a relationship exists between stimulation and performance." The relationship is one of diminishing returns. Here's how it works. "So caffeine, obviously, offers stimulation," De Santis said. "In turn, that stimulation has the potential to enhance an individual's work or it was surprising to Andy De Santis, a registered dietitian and weight loss specialist. "I've written and looked into the evidence on caffeine on numerous occasions, and my understanding of the best available science was always that, while caffeine can offer enhanced attention and

focus, there is much less convincing evidence it's going to make you better at making tough decisions or carrying out more complex tasks," he told Healthline. exercise performance, especially if fatigue is causing a performance detriment."

"But that relationship only works up to a certain critical point, beyond which overstimulation (i.e., too much caffeine) actually detracts from our performance by making it harder to focus," he explained. "This one actually depends a lot on genetics," says Kirkpatrick. "For example, some people are fast metabolizers of caffeine, while others are slow."

"The determining factor lies in the CYP1A2 gene that has been studied extensively," she said. It was surprising to Andy De Santis, a registered dietitian and weight loss specialist. "I've written and looked into the evidence on caffeine on numerous occasions, and my understanding of the best available science was always that, while caffeine can offer enhanced attention and focus, there is much less convincing evidence it's going to make you better at making tough decisions or carrying out

more complex tasks," he told Healthline.

"For slow metabolizers, excess caffeine can be deadly."

"Speaking in more general terms, we all react differently to caffeine, so I would think that this would be no different," Kirkpatrick explained. "Alertness and increased energy would both be likely impacted by your personal metabolism of caffeine."

You know your body best, so listen to what it's saying.

"Most of us know how we react to caffeine," said Kirkpatrick. "Some of my patients have six-plus cups a day, while others can't have more than one cup of coffee."

"If you feel jittery, nervous, can't sleep at night due to coffee consumption, it might not be the right stimulant for you," she added.

However, if you tolerate caffeine and use it as a performance enhancement, De Santis says it's probably OK to drink a larger amount of coffee. "There is no evidence to suggest caffeine inhibits creativity, so I'm not sure we need to make too much of it," he said. —AFP

Life-changing magic of doing absolutely nothing postpartum

LONDON: Hear me out for a minute: What if, in a world of girl-wash-your-face and hustling and #girlbossing and bounce-backing, we completely changed the way we look at the postpartum period for moms?

What if, instead of assaulting moms with messages of how they can get organized and sleep train and meal plan and work out more, we just gave permission for new moms to do... nothing?

Yes, that's right — absolutely nothing.

That is, doing nothing at least for a little while — as long as possible — given other life constraints, whether that's returning to full-time work or tending to other young children in your home.

It feels weird, doesn't it? To imagine that? I mean, what does doing nothing even look like in today's world for women? We're so used to multitasking and constantly having a running mental list of a million things going at once and thinking 12 steps ahead and planning and prepping that doing nothing almost seems laughable.

But I believe that all new moms should make a plan for doing absolutely nothing after having a baby — and here's why.

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Your privacy is important to us

Having a baby today generally involves a ton of prep work. There's the baby registry and the shower and the research and the birth plan and the setting up of the nursery and the "big" questions like: Will you get the epidural? Will you delay cord clamping? Will you breast-feed?

And after all that planning and prep work and organizing comes actually birthing the baby, and then you find yourself at home in sweatpants wondering what the heck comes next. Or trying to determine how to do all the things in the few days you have before you need to be back at work.

It can almost feel like with all the preparation that comes before the baby, the aftermath should be equally as busy. And so, we fill it, with things like post-baby workout plans and baby schedules and sleep training and baby music classes and schedules for you to get your self-care going again.

For some reason, we seem eager to frame having a baby as just a momentary blip in a woman's life — think Duchess Kate smiling atop of those stone steps in her perfectly pressed dress and coiffed hair — instead of treating it the way it deserves to be treated: like coming to a giant, screeching, usually painful, halt in the road.

Having a baby changes everything in your life, and while everyone is focused on the newborn, mom's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health just doesn't get the time and priority that it

