

Eating Healthy During a Pandemic or Other Emergency (Part 1)

Eating non-perishable foods doesn't have to get in the way of eating healthy, says Palomar Health Registered Dietician Janice Baker.

Now that grocery store supply chains have largely returned to normal you can successfully and ethically stock your shelves with pasta, canned food, powdered mixes and other non-perishable foods that store well, taste great and are good for you. We have learned during the coronavirus pandemic that food won't always be readily available.

Eating preservative-free fresh foods has always been high on the list of recommendations for eating healthy, but Baker says canned vegetables, canned tuna, spaghetti and other non-fresh foods can still be part of a healthy diet, including carbohydrates.

"We often hear 'don't eat bread, don't eat carbs,' but eat whatever bread you like," Baker said. "A sandwich has never sent anyone to my office."

Baker rattled off peanut butter, tuna, egg salad and grilled cheese as great ingredients for sandwiches to eat any time of the day. She recommends freezing extra bread to have on hand in case of emergencies.

Nut butters are a particular favorite of Baker as they are a great source of protein, contain healthy fats, store for long periods of time and can be used in many ways. If you are allergic to peanuts, you can use sun butter, made from sunflower seeds as an alternative.

She says canned foods are great to have on hand to eat at any time. One of the most versatile is chicken stock or broth, which often come in cardboard containers.

You can make a quick, semi-homemade soup by shredding up cabbage, carrots, tomatoes or other canned or frozen veggies, by adding them to the broth. Baker recommends maintaining a good supply of canned protein sources such as tuna, salmon and chicken to also add to the soup.

Her favorite source of protein are eggs, which all other proteins are compared to, she says. They have a very high protein efficiency ratio. They contain high-quality iron, vitamins, minerals and fats. Medical research has largely debunked the once popular theory that eggs cause heart disease, Baker said. A good storage option for eggs are pre-packaged egg whites, which can be frozen. Baker uses egg whites for quiches, desserts and omelets. They have no cholesterol because they don't have the yoke.

Because of popular diets that vilify foods with carbohydrates like rice, bread and pasta, potatoes have gotten a bad rap, Baker said.

"That isn't right," Baker said. "Potatoes have great nutrients, fiber, vitamin c, beta-carotene, potassium, and iron – they're versatile and taste great," Baker said. "Don't be a tater hater."

This is part 1 of a 2-part series on eating healthy during a pandemic or other emergency. Janice Baker is a registered dietician, certified diabetes educator and certified nutrition support clinician.