



Shopping with a grocery list is one way to be more efficient at the store.

Healthy living: Specialist shares possible pandemic positives

Some of the habits we've developed recently could serve us well in the future

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MANHATTAN, Kan. – Many of the healthy habits that Americans have been pushed toward during the COVID-19 pandemic could be well worth keeping as they return to some version of their previous lives, says Kansas State University nutrition specialist Sandy Procter.

“At this point, some of the early studies are just data points, but what it’s looking like is that some of these healthy habits cropping up during the pandemic would be good to keep,” Procter said. “Some of these things might have started out as personal inconveniences or changes, but we might want to consider looking at them for the longer run.”

One of the most important lessons learned during the first two months of the pandemic is also one of the most simple, she added.

“We’ve all been washing our hands a lot more frequently,” Procter said. “Wash your hands like you mean it, because we do mean it, and we will mean it from now on. It’s probably never going to go back to where it is an after-thought. It will hopefully stay present in everyone’s mind. Experts tell us this is really the biggest thing we can do to keep ourselves healthy.”

Procter said many extension professionals’ jobs have gotten busier during the pandemic. “The demand for timely information has increased,” she said. She and many of her colleagues have been working to remind consumers of the benefits of reducing trips to the grocery store, planning meals, reducing food waste, preparing home foods safely, and more.

She noted that shopping with a grocery list has been an important topic for a lot of reasons.

“I kind of think of cutting a shopping trip as something I can contribute to the overall good,” Procter said. “In our home, we’ve been trying to decrease those trips and decrease human contact, and thinking about those people who are in that store working. They need our business, but they don’t need additional contact. It’s just one little way I can contribute to hopefully making things better.”

Procter said taking fewer trips to the store also means that consumers must think more carefully about planning meals, which often leads to preparing creative, more healthful options and wasting less food. They’re also likely to save money.

“It’s sort of a combination of health effects and the cost benefit of cooking at home,” she said. “And quite frankly, it can be rewarding. It’s a real benefit for people to re-visit or expand their cooking at home, to learn that they have skills they didn’t know they had and to share those skills with other family members.”

Some other areas that Procter listed as important to “keep” in the future include:

- Slowing down. “We’ve learned to take time to reflect on ourselves and connect with others,” she said.
- Appreciation. “We’ve all realized how people everywhere have stepped up to improve the situation. Hopefully this isn’t just passing thankfulness, but instead something we can carry forward.”
- Physical activity. Exercise is not just good for our physical health, Procter notes, but also good for mental health and stress relief.
- Connecting with family. In addition to spending more time together, family members should keep up the commitment to stay in touch with extended family and friends, especially older adults who may live alone. “A phone call works wonders for helping people stay connected,” Procter said.

Procter also urges consumers to continue thinking of their homes as “a self care center. Think of ways that health comes from our homes, including the activities or work that we do there, and the rest and respite we find there.”

“Keeping our home as a self care center could serve us well as a new healthy habit.”

K-State Research and Extension has compiled numerous publications and other information to help people take care of themselves and others during tough times and good times. See a [comprehensive list of resources online](#).