



Maintain Healthy Habits and Take Breaks

Without daily physical education (PE), recess, school athletics, and structured movement breaks, many students will miss healthy routines while in school at home, mostly sitting in front of screens. It is important to add breaks to the home learning schedule to include time for healthy eating, hydration, exercise, and time outside. Students with autism are already at higher risk for sedentary hobbies, restricted diets, and anxiety/depression, so supporting physical and mental health is an important part of the daily routine. Being at home may allow for greater participation in healthy routines, like making snacks and meals, going on walk with a family pet, or doing outdoor chores. The resources in this section are designed to encourage healthy habits during the online learning period and beyond.



Resources include:

- Meals and Snacks during Online Learning
- Snack Choice Board Example
- Staying Active
- Exercise Activities
- Movement Resources

Meals & Snacks during Online Learning

With virtual learning, your child is eating at home more than ever. Your child may have had different routines for meals and snacks at school, which could impact how you plan for those times during a virtual school day at home. For example, your routines and expectations for a family dinner may be different than for a school day lunch. Below are some ideas for how to make meals and snacks work for your child(ren) and your family.



Make meals and snack a regular part of a daily routine. Meals and snacks can add predictability in virtual learning routines that may vary from day to day. Hopefully there is a schedule that allows for consistent times for snacks and meals, but if not, you can still build a routine by having a regular location or a consistent transition routine (for example turn off computer, wash hands, and eat).

Consider your child's needs. For some children, meals or snacks are a needed and deserved social break from being engaged in online schoolwork for the rest of the day. School is hard and virtual school may take a different level of focus. If your child needs these times to recharge, consider setting up a mealtime or snack time routine that allows for downtime. Not all meals need to be family meals just because you are at home. For other children, meals or snacks might be a time to process or share about their day. They may want or need to talk to someone during these snacks or meals.

Balance healthy eating and independence. Healthy eating is certainly important, but snacks and meals at school are often a time when children can exercise their independence. Provide healthy options, but also offer children an opportunity to make choices, just as they might when they are eating in the cafeteria at school. See the sample snack choice board on the following page.

Think about building in social opportunities. Snacks and meals are often used as a time for building social skills in the school day (like lunch groups). As noted above, these times may also be a welcome break, but consider building in social experiences on occasion. This could be a physically distanced lunch with other children in the neighborhood, a virtual meet-up with a classmate or friend, or a special "kids only" lunch with their siblings.

Always consult your child's doctor if there are concerns about nutrition, growth, or food allergies.

For more information see: <https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/autism-tips-and-resources/tips-for-structuring-meals>

Snack Choice Board Example



Hummus & vegetables



Peanut butter & apples



Yogurt & fruit



Cheese & crackers

Staying Active

Regular physical movement and activity is important for physical and mental health and can have a positive impact on learning. Regular activity helps the body stay healthy. It can reduce blood pressure, manage weight, and reduce the risk of various diseases. It can also improve strength, balance, flexibility, and overall fitness. Physical activity helps improve mental health by reducing the risk of depression and improving overall feelings of well-being. By scheduling regular activity, you can help bring routine to your child's day.



Stay Active at Home:

- ✓ If your child sits for long periods of time, try to have your child take a 3-5-minute break every 20-30 minutes. If the school schedule does not have time for these breaks, consider having your child stand and/or stretch as a break from sitting.
- ✓ Make time in your child's daily schedule to be physically active. Setting a routine will help your child stay active every day.
- ✓ If your child is not used to physical activity, start small and gradually increase your child's activity level over time.

Stay Safe:

- ✓ If your child has a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, **DO NOT let them** exercise. Call your child's doctor.
- ✓ When walking, running, or biking, make sure your child stays at least 6 feet from others, and wash or sanitize their hands before and after.
- ✓ If your child does not exercise regularly, start slowly with low intensity activities. Short walks are a good way to start.
- ✓ Choose the best activity for your child! Pick an activity that your child enjoys and that fits their current fitness level.

Adapted from the World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/be-active-during-covid-19>

Exercise Activities



Inside



Outside



Lift weights



Play ball



Dance



Yard work



Climb stairs



Take a walk



Yoga



Go on a nature hike



Inside



Outside



Use food items (e.g., cans) or cleaning supplies as weights



Take a walk or ride a bike



Learn a dance from an app (YouTube, Tik Tok) or dance to your favorite song



Gardening or yard work



Do heavy work like carrying heavy items up and down stairs



Go on a nature scavenger hunt



Try yoga or animal poses/walks like crab walks, bear walks, frog jumps...



Play catch or jump rope

Movement Resources for Kids



[GoNoodle](#)



[Stop, Breathe & Think Kids](#)



[Cosmic Kids Yoga](#)



[Get Kids Moving](#)



[The Learning Station](#)



[Active for Life](#)



[Born to Move](#)



[Yoga with Adriene](#)