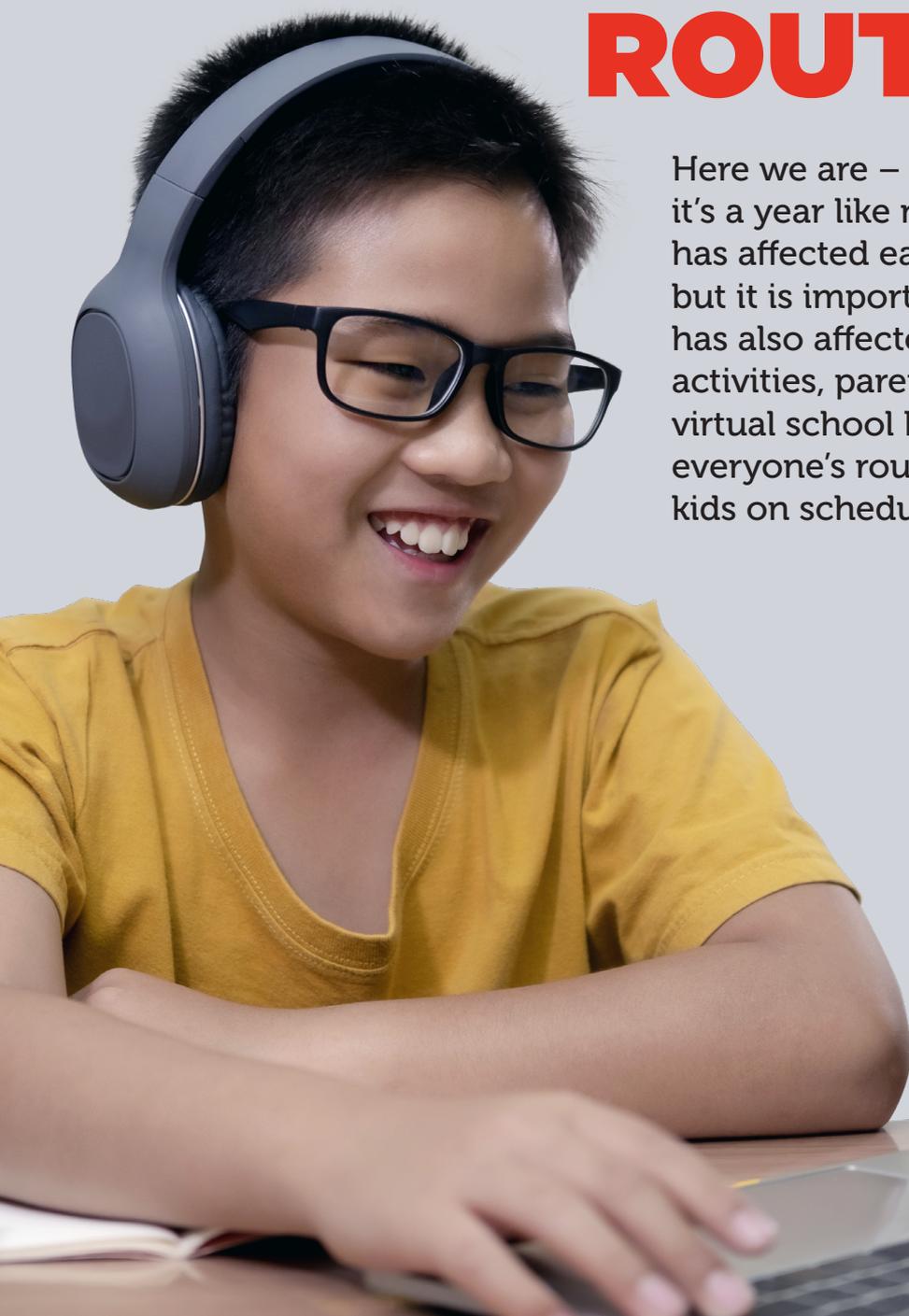


Helping Your Kids Thrive with a **HEALTHY ROUTINE**

by Sarah Muntel, RD

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a yellow t-shirt, black-rimmed glasses, and large grey headphones, is smiling broadly while sitting at a desk. He is looking at a laptop screen. To his right, a wooden pencil holder contains several colored pencils. The background is a plain, light grey wall.

Here we are – it's the end of 2020, and it's a year like no one expected. This year has affected each of us in different ways, but it is important to remember that it has also affected our kids. Cancelled activities, parents working from home and virtual school have all thrown a wrench in everyone's routine. How can we keep our kids on schedule in these crazy times?

Virtual School

As many parents are finding out, it can be a challenge to motivate your child to complete school virtually. Before this year, they became used to going to school with their friends and learning in person. Now, some kids are stuck behind the computer all day and may not get to see their friends at all. Here are some ways you can keep them motivated and on a positive track:

- Set up a consistent work space at a table or desk.
- Treat virtual school just like regular school with a set start time.
- Set up Zoom or phone calls with classmates during lunch for social interaction.
- Keep your child's meals on a schedule like they would be if they were at school.
- Get them dressed in their school clothes instead of letting them stay in their PJ's all day.



Kids need a balanced breakfast to get them motivated for the day, even if it means they won't be leaving home. Serve the breakfast below with a side of low-sugar yogurt and fresh fruit for an award-winning breakfast!

Healthy Banana Oatmeal Muffins

Recipe from [GimmeDelicious.com](https://www.gimmedelicious.com)

Ingredients:

- 2 cups whole wheat flour or all-purpose gluten-free flour
- ¼ cup old-fashioned oats plus more for sprinkling on top
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- ½ tsp. cinnamon (*optional*)
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 cup mashed ripe bananas
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup honey or maple syrup
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease muffin tin with butter or cooking spray or line with liners. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, oats, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. Set aside.
3. In another large bowl, beat the mashed bananas, eggs, honey, olive oil, milk, and vanilla. Add the dry ingredients and mix until fully combined. Do not over-mix.
4. Divide mixture evenly into 12 muffin cups. Sprinkle with rolled oats and cinnamon if desired.
5. Bake muffins for 20 to 25 minutes.

Adding Activities to Your Child's Day

The normalcy of sports and social interaction may also have changed for your child this year. It's important to keep kids active and make sure that their days don't just consist of virtual schooling and watching TV. Here are some fun ways you can keep your kids healthy and happy:

- Take your kids on a hike or walk outside.
- Play a game of basketball or kickball.
- Have a family game night or movie night.
- Ensure your kids get at least 30 minutes of play time or physical activity each day.
- Take advantage of parks and backyards if you have one.
- Encourage your child to pick up a new hobby.



After a long day of keeping your kids healthy and entertained, dinner may be the last thing on your mind. Here is an easy and healthy recipe for those fun-filled nights:

Chicken Taco Poblano Rice Bowls

Recipe from *TheSkinnyTaste.com*

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ lbs. organic boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into ½ inch cubes
- 2 tsp. olive oil
- 1 medium red onion, peeled and diced
- ¼ cup cilantro, minced, plus more for garnish
- 1 Poblano pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 Roma tomato, cored and diced
- 1 lime, halved
- Taco seasoning
- Kosher salt
- 1 cup frozen or fresh corn kernels
- 3 cups cooked brown rice, heated (*use cauliflower rice for low-carb*)
- ¼ cup cheddar jack cheese
- ¼ cup of 2% sour cream or Greek yogurt

Taco seasoning:

- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. chili powder
- ½ tsp. paprika
- ½ tsp. oregano



Directions:

1. Dice the chicken into small pieces. Combine taco seasoning in a small bowl and set aside.
2. To make the Pico de Gallo, combine 3 tablespoons of diced onion, tomato, cilantro, 2 teaspoons of lime juice and a quarter teaspoon of salt into a bowl. Set aside.
3. Add oil to a large skillet over medium-high heat. When hot, add the chicken and cook until it starts to brown, 2 to 3 minutes.
4. Add the remaining onion, Poblano pepper and taco seasoning to the skillet and cook until it softens, 2 to 3 minutes. Add half a cup of water and the corn. Cook 1 to 2 minutes, then remove from heat.
5. Divide rice in 4 bowls, top with chicken, cheese, Pico de Gallo and sour cream (*optional*).

Meal and Snack Times

What your child eats is important! A lack of routine can lead to an all-out eat fest with everyone home during the day. While you are home, your day can easily turn into a handful of cereal in the morning, a pastry mid-morning and back to the fridge before lunch. Sound familiar? How you choose food and how you prepare it can make all the difference.

Here are some ways that you can keep your child's meals healthy and fun:

- **Meal times** – Make a plan early in the week by setting meal and snack times in advance. Planning for meals and snacks can lead to less grazing during the day. Consider displaying a dry erase board in the kitchen so everyone is aware of the plan for the day.
- **Pre-portioned meal choices** – Stock your fridge and pantry with individual serving sizes so your family's portion sizes can stay in check. You can purchase these individually (*ex: bistro boxes with a sandwich, veggies and handful of nuts*) or bag them up as you purchase them.
- **Choose wisely** – Complex carbohydrates and protein can help you feel full for a longer period of time. By choosing balanced meals and snacks, you are more likely to feel satisfied and less likely to graze!
- **Get everyone involved** – Get the whole gang involved in meal planning and meal prep. Your kids are more likely to get on board if they have a say in it all. Come up with several healthy meal and snack options and let the kids choose which options they want to eat.



Find New Traditions

Every family has their own traditions or things that they look forward to on the weekends or in the evening. Try finding a “new normal” in light of the things you used to do.

Old Traditions:

- Going to Church in person
- Going out to eat at a restaurant
- Going to a friend's house for a play date

New Traditions:

- Watching church online with a healthy breakfast
- Gathering together for dinner at the table or having fun themed dinner nights
- Organizing a group Zoom call that includes fun virtual activities

That's a Wrap!

During these uncertain and trying times, making a “new normal” for your kids can mean the world to them. It might even help you too! Get creative and make the most out of what you have.

About the Author:

Sarah Muntel, RD, is a registered dietitian from Indianapolis, IN. She has worked in the field of bariatrics for the past 18 years, working with both bariatric and metabolic surgery patients as well as medical weight loss patients. Sarah is an active member of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and frequently contributes to OAC's Weight Matters Magazine and Your Weight Matters Blog.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

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- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
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