There is no playbook for COVID-19. There is no guideline that explains how isolation should be done, how hospitals should be prepared, or what we can expect when businesses begin opening again. The truth is, much of what we are doing is unscripted, unknowable, and uncertain. And that, it turns out, could be creating a great deal of anxiety, fear, and even depression for Americans.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and isolation efforts in March, Americans have been reporting increasing pressure on their mental health, according to research from Healthline conducted through YouGov’s COVID-19 tracker. Whether it’s because they’ve lost a job or fear losing one, they’re struggling to piece together money to pay bills, or they’re worried about their health and safety (or that of everyone in their house), the continuous onslaught of worry and insecurity is leading to greater mental health issues than before.

Today, Americans are reporting more symptoms and signs of depression, anxiety, and fear than historic norms. What’s more, the same Healthline poll found that this increase has been sustained for several weeks and showing no signs yet of fading.

Depression, like anxiety and fear, often has clear symptoms: a depressed mood; feeling sad, empty, or hopeless; having difficulty with day-to-day tasks; increased fatigue; and sleep difficulties. Some of these symptoms can be challenging to spot right now, says Timothy J. Legg, PhD, PsyD, MSN, MPA, a board certified geriatric and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, licensed psychologist, and member of Healthline’s Medical Affairs team. “In the early weeks of the epidemic, flour, sugar, yeast, and other baking products disappeared from grocery store shelves. Some people may attribute weight gain to the fact that their gyms are closed and that they have been baking or cooking more than they had been, while others may be experiencing weight loss that may be due to depressive symptoms and dismissing it as, ‘Well, I’m not doing much, so I haven’t been hungry.’”

This is precisely what makes spotting burgeoning mental health issues problematic—and it may be what keeps people from seeking help if they need it. It’s hard to know what is to be expected.

Resources to deal with depression or anxiety:

—> Find a therapist. Many therapists now offer treatment online, and various apps can connect people with virtual therapists.

—> Be patient with yourself. No one has experienced this before, so it is understandable if you don’t know how to cope. Allow yourself to be emotional.

—> Move around. Even if you can’t get to a gym, home workouts are a perfect way to stay active. Take a walk, play some tennis, or find a YouTube fitness video. A little bit of movement each day will vastly boost your mood.

—> Set a routine. Don’t try to be a perfectionist with your schedule, but it may help you to keep your days consistent. Try to wake up at the same time each day, and set goals for what to complete during the day.

—> Make social contact. Facetime or Zoom with family members to stay connected. There are ways to stay social without being physically close to each other.

“We are all living in very stressful and uncertain times right now. If you are feeling stress and are noticing that it is impacting your mood, sleep, or eating patterns, don’t wait. Get help. You will be glad that you did.”

Source: Healthline
Healthy Cooking: Double Chocolate Zucchini Muffins

Ingredients:
1 1/4 cups all-purpose or whole-wheat flour
1/3 cup cocoa powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. salt
2 tbsp. coconut oil, melted and cooled
1/3 cup honey or maple syrup
1 tsp. vanilla
1 egg
1 cup shredded zucchini (~1 medium zucchini)
1 ripe mashed banana
1/2 cup milk of choice
1/2 cup chocolate chips

Directions:
1. Preheat oven to 350F. Line a 12-cup muffin tin with cupcake liners and spray with cooking spray.
2. Squeeze zucchini with a kitchen towel to wring out excess water.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt. Set aside.
4. With an electric mixer, mix coconut oil, honey/maple syrup, vanilla, and the egg together in a large bowl. Add in zucchini, banana, and milk, and mix again. Slowly add in the dry ingredients and mix until combined. Fold in the chocolate chips.
5. Evenly divide the batter between the 12 prepared liners. Bake 22-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. After 5 minutes, transfer to a wire rack to finish cooling. Enjoy!
Educational Corner: Skin Protection from the Sun

What are the dangers of sun exposure?
The immediate danger of too much sun is sunburn. If you looked at sunburned skin under a strong microscope, you would see that the cells and blood vessels have been damaged. With repeated sun damage, the skin starts to look dry, wrinkled, discolored, and leathery. Although the skin appears to be thicker, it actually has been weakened and, as a result, it will bruise more easily.

However, the sun’s most serious threat is that it is the major cause of skin cancer, which is now the most common of all cancers. Doctors believe that most skin cancers can be avoided by preventing sun damage.

Does the sun have benefits?
You may have been taught that you need sunlight for your body to make vitamin D, because vitamin D is not found naturally in most foods. But today, many foods are fortified with vitamin D during the manufacturing process. Thus, sun exposure is not as important for the body’s vitamin D supply as it used to be. Of course, being outdoors makes most people feel good. And playing tennis is better for your health than watching television. But you can still protect yourself from the sun’s damaging effects while enjoying yourself outdoors.

How can I avoid the harmful effects of the sun?
Staying out of the sun is the best way to avoid sun damage, but most of us go outdoors regularly. So when you go outside, take these precautions:

- Always wear sunscreen. Apply it on your skin every day. Make it a habit, as you do with brushing your teeth.
- Avoid sun in the middle of the day, from about 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The ultraviolet rays, which cause sunburn, are strongest during this time.
- Wear protective clothing. When you do go outdoors, especially for long periods in the middle of the day. Long sleeves and slacks, as well as a wide-brimmed hat, help protect your body against the sun’s harmful effects.
- Wear sunglasses that filter UV light.

Who should use sunscreen?
Anyone who spends time outdoors should use a sunscreen. This includes:

- Men, women, and children.
- People who tan easily and those who don’t.
- Fair-skinned and dark-skinned people.
- People who already have tans and sunbathers, gardeners, and skiers.

Should I skip sunscreen if I have sensitive skin?
Some sunscreens contain ingredients that may irritate the skin. If you know you react to specific ingredients, be sure to check the contents on the label. You can also ask your dermatologist to recommend a sunscreen.

However, the sunscreen may not be causing the reaction. Other products that come into contact with your skin, including perfumes, certain medications, and soaps, may make your skin more sensitive. Think about the products you have been using (especially new products), and stop using these products one by one before you stop using the sunscreen. If you are not sure about the side effects of a medication you are taking, consult with your doctor or local pharmacist.

Source: Cleveland Clinic
During quarantine, trips to the stores are limited. These trips may include impulsive buys or buying food in bulk which then may spoil before they are eaten. Both of these can lead to an increase in food waste.

Reducing food waste is one of the top ways to combat climate change. Wasted food also equals wasted money. Therefore, we want to strive to waste less, save more and plan better. How can we maximize our groceries and minimize our food waste? Here are some tips to achieve this...

1. **Plan your meals.** Buy only the foods that you eat and then eat what you buy. Find recipes that cross utilize ingredients. For example, if you buy fresh ginger to make chicken stir fry on Monday. Then plan to cook a ginger-honey glazed pork tenderloin on Wednesday or Thursday.
2. **Organize your fridge.** When it’s organized, you’ll know exactly what you have so you’ll be more likely to eat it and you won’t buy it again at the grocery store. Store raw meat and fish at the bottom of the fridge. Put veggies in the high humidity drawer and fruits in the low humidity drawer. Store leftovers on the upper shelves labeled with dates.
3. **Stock up** on foods with longer shelf lives like onions, root vegetables, potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples, oranges, and clementines.
4. **Learn new cooking skills.** With more time at home,