



DR. ALISON'S

'Pandemic Parenting Guide' for a Calm and Stress-Free Home



During these difficult times—learn how to practice self-care, get more sleep, and reduce stress as a parent (and how to model all of this for your children).

Hi! I'm Dr. Alison Mitzner—board-certified pediatrician and family wellness and fitness expert, who loves to help parents of all types create healthier lifestyles, happier families, and safer environments while caring for their kids.

My parenting articles have appeared in: *The Huffington Post, Today, Shape, Self, Aaptiv, The Everymom, Parents, Reader's Digest, Mamapedia*, and more!

Right now, times are extra challenging for parents and families. If you're reading this during the current pandemic, we're now *working from home, parenting from home, schooling from home, cooking (or ordering) food from home, exercising from home*, and the list goes on and on....

As a physician, pediatrician, and family wellness expert—along with being a single mom of 2 who is going through this same situation—I've been asked to contribute to national media outlets (such as *Yahoo, MIC, Bustle, Healthline*, etc) to share science-backed tips and advice for parents and families during these challenging times.

That's why I want to share these "Pandemic Parenting Tips" with you so you can **practice self-care, get more sleep, reduce stress, and parent more calmly and confidently.**

I packed a LOT of info into this guide so feel free to skip to the different sections:

1. [Sleep](#)

2. [Fitness](#)

3. [Diet](#)

4. [Stress and Anxiety Reduction](#)

5. ['Stuck at Home' Parenting Tips](#)



FIRST, THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELING:

Before we start... I want to share the importance of being a role model for your kid(s).

Your kids are looking to you to feel safe and secure. We have to try to stay calm as best as we can and try to limit our anxiety. I know it's stressful, but if we are anxious or overwhelmed, then our kids can also feel anxious and overwhelmed.

By practicing the tips I share below, it can trickle down to how your kids experience life. They are always modeling off of you. **And of course, just do the best you can!** We're all going through our own challenges and experiences.

SECOND, THE IMPORTANCE OF IMMUNITY:

Immunity is a word that's been talked about a LOT in the past months. And with good reason.

As you might be aware, our immune system helps protect you from disease and sickness. The stronger you (and your children's) immune systems are, the better you can handle illness.

All of the following sections actually help to support and strengthen your immune system. There isn't one "pill to take" to boost your immune system, but it's a blend of all the following practices.

For a strong and healthy immune system, you want to:

- Get a good amount of sleep and rest (including good quality sleep)
- Eat a healthy diet with good nutrition
- Practice fitness and exercise daily
- Have reduced stress (THIS is a big one)
- Practice great overall self-care

A strong and healthy immune system will be one of the biggest support systems for you (and your family) to keep a healthy body and life—and also protect against the current illnesses.

READY? LET'S DIG IN! —>

My 5 Pandemic Parenting Tips for a Calm and Stress-Free Home

1. Sleep

I'm sure you've heard it over and over. Sleep is so important for your health, your stress levels, your immunity, and your mindset throughout the day. Good sleep is not only beneficial to your health and your mind, it also helps you be more patient and boosts your immune system.

Lack of sleep can decrease our immunity and increase risk of illness. While sleep doesn't necessarily prevent you from getting sick, the lack of good sleep or enough sleep can leave you more susceptible and increase risk of illness. You want to get good rest so you can keep your immune system 'ready to go' to ward off infections.

Also, the more sleep deprived you are, the more impatient you might be with your kids. It can make you cranky and also affect your eating because sleep disrupts your hunger hormones.

DR. ALISON'S SLEEP TIPS:

- **Create a steady sleep routine.** Try to keep your sleep schedule the same as if you were working or going into an office. Keep somewhat normal bedtime and wake times. Don't sleep in!
- **Ensure at least 7-8 hours of sleep per night.** Of course, this will change if you are a new parent or a parent of a 2, 5, 7, or 17-year-old. Adapt as you can.
- **Limit media and try to get uninterrupted, quality sleep.** Turn off electronics 1-hour before bed to keep from being overstimulated (and stop scrolling through news and social media before you try to sleep—especially if it makes you more anxious!). Try to limit media to 1-2x per day.
- **Try to NOT keep the phone next to you at night.** Try putting it across the room. This makes it harder for you to quickly grab the phone, which can distract your mind and negatively affect your sleep with the phone's stimulating light.
- **Prepare for sleep by reading a book, listening to soft music, or practicing mindful meditation** (some great apps are: Headspace, Calm, and Waking Up).
- **Write out a list of all the things in your head that you need to do and plan out the next day the night before.** This practice helps your mind to be relaxed.
- **Lastly, do what's in the next section – fitness!** Being active and exercising will help your mind and body rest and you will sleep better at night.

MORE TIPS ON NEXT PAGE! →

2. Fitness

We have to keep our bodies strong and in motion. This is especially important right now. When you're living your entire life 'at home' you are likely busier than ever and that's even more reason to ensure you move each and every day.

Exercise boosts your immune system, helps wake you up physically and mentally, and improves your mood. It gives you more energy during the day, helps you fall asleep faster, and improves the quality of sleep. Exercise also reduces the body's stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol.

BUT, you also don't have to go "all out" on fitness—especially when you're busy being a mom and handling 1,000 things.

You can do 15-20 minutes of exercise per day and this will be super helpful. You can even do it with your kids! It's great to lead by example. You can strengthen family connection and create wonderful memories at the same time. Again, we are our children's greatest role models. If they see you exercising, working out and staying fit, they will join in on those habits (when they likely don't want to do much other than watch TV while stuck at home!). They can learn the value of fitness and all these other good healthy habits early on.

DR. ALISON'S FITNESS TIPS:

- **The good news is that there's a lot you can do at home with just your bodyweight and very little equipment.** Think of things like: planks, pushups, lunges, burpees, squats, lunges to name just a few!
- **You want to focus on cardio and strength.** A strong core is important too.
- **I personally love and recommend HIIT (high intensity interval training) exercises.** It is super efficient and a great workout and can be done in so many variations right now while stuck at home.
 - **Whether 10-min or 30-min, anyone can do it!** There are so many online HIIT videos or workouts to choose from. [Here's a few to start with.](#)
 - **Don't have weights? No problem!** Use water bottles, books, cans of food, towels, a kid's backpack filled with books. Look around your house and see what may work.
- **There are so many different types of online classes and offerings now on the internet, on Youtube, on Instagram.** Find one that you enjoy with friends or music you love.
- **Here's one of my favorite 12-minute HIIT exercise routines I put together when I had a sports injury in the past. It comes in useful again while home:**

Dr. Alison's Fitness Routine: 6 exercises, 30-seconds each for a 3 minute round (alternate high intensity exercise followed by a less intense exercise to recover). You can do this 4X for a 12-minute workout. Start with 2X for a 6-minute workout if you need!

 - Mountain climbers
 - Standing crunches
 - Plank variation
 - Burpees
 - Squat jumps
 - Squated cross punches
- **Of course, yoga helps with stress and wellbeing and takes up little space.**
- **Again, even just 15-20 minutes per day is good!**

3. Diet

Diet and nutrition is so vital to your health, your body, your mind, and your immunity. What we eat affects our sleep, our energy, our stress levels, and our immune system. Again, all of these different elements are intertwined and affect your overall well being.

When we're 'stuck at home' it can be MUCH easier to eat unhealthy food. Many people end up eating unhealthy "snacks" and "comfort food" when they're at home all day. Grocery shopping is also not an easy task right now. Eating like this can lead to weight gain, lethargy, issues with sleep, and much more.

Shopping right and eating clean/healthy is one of the best things you can do during these times. Good nutrition can create a direct change in your mood, your energy, your sleep patterns, and your general sense of well-being throughout the day!

DR. ALISON'S FOOD/NUTRITION TIPS:

- **Try and maintain your normal meal schedule (3 meals per day).** Try to keep to regular breakfast, lunch, and dinner along with healthy snacks.
- **Healthy snacks are better** (don't go for 'comfort' food or unhealthy snacks). You want to eat healthy snacks for your energy levels and digestion.
- **To strengthen your immune system — eat food that is high in Vitamin C, Zinc and Probiotics.** While Vitamin C doesn't prevent or treat covid-19, it does affect our immunity. It is an antioxidant which can decrease inflammation and can improve immune function.
- **Eat good, nutritious, tasty foods such as:**
 - Fruits, vegetables, healthy proteins— stock up on celery, carrots, peanut butter, broccoli, spinach, yogurt, blueberries, sweet potato, salmon, tuna and other oily fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
 - Almonds and nuts are great snacks (so you can eat healthy if you have hunger pangs)
 - Make smoothies and juices (banana, almond milk, blueberries, almond butter is my fav!)
 - Good examples of foods rich in Vitamin C are broccoli, cauliflower (cauliflower pizza is a hit in my family!) brussel sprouts, zucchini, kale (kale chips), strawberries, and lemon.
- **Limit "grazing and snacking all day long" as best you can.** Grazing impacts your hunger cues. You can also end up eating more than you thought.
- **Try not to eat out of boredom or just because the food is around!** (And same goes for the kids). Keep finding activities that keep you and your children occupied ([see Tip #5 below](#)). You can also make a rule to "eat only in the dining area" for yourself or your kids that will help you from constantly eating.
- **Food and diet can seem difficult to change at first, but we can start small.** Starting small will help to make the diet easier to stick with too. Try getting rid of all the "comfort food" and snacks first and replacing them with healthy ones versus revamping our entire pantry and fridge. Even small changes can make a big difference. As we start to feel better, we can start making bigger changes.
- **And lastly.... try to limit alcohol.** It can be easier to have an extra glass of wine or a cocktail when we're always at home, but alcohol can affect your sleep and of course, add unnecessary calories.

4. Stress and Anxiety Reduction

Stress is the “silent killer”. It is well known that stress can increase susceptibility to illness. Stress can affect the body’s immune system negatively. And right now, for many people, stress can be through the roof.

With all the doom-and-gloom news, parents working AND schooling from home, and people just not sure how to react to everything going on in the world... there’s no doubt that stress is increasing.

The previous sections are HUGE stress reducers and immune-strengthening practices. I always recommend, if you want to reduce your stress—make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and getting exercise. Here are even more tips.

DR. ALISON'S ADDITIONAL STRESS REDUCTION TIPS:

- **Know the current medical facts** (check out [my media articles on my website](#))
— The more you know, the less stressed you will likely be i.e. You might wonder: “Do I have to “wash every little thing”? “What do I have to do after getting groceries?” “What precautions do I need to take for my kids?” *I share helpful articles on the science-backed answers for topics such as these. Read the right articles and you’ll feel better.*
- **Again, limit news/media to 1 hour per day! I can’t stress this enough.** Don’t just “graze media” like snacks all day. The more news and media you intake, often the more stress and fear will likely build up.
 - If you reduce media, you can reduce anxiety.
 - Consider only 30-min in AM and 30-min in PM.
- **Practice mindfulness, meditation, or do light exercise.** Movement in the body and calming the mind are super helpful, but do whatever works for you! These practices will help calm the mind and all our busy thoughts.
- **To help reduce your children’s stress, be a role model for them.** Your anxiety trickles down to your kids, so by reducing stress, you can reduce their stress. Knowing this is important, and as hard as it is, knowing this sometimes helps you control it.
- **In addition to the last point, reassure your kids on what’s going on in the world.** Talk to them about what’s going on in the news, in the world, with the masks, and with health overall. You want to limit your child’s fear and anxiety as best you can.

5. 'Stuck at Home' Parenting Tips

Your kids need you now more than ever. Even if we think we're around our kids more these days, we actually still want to spend **quality time** with our kids.

Take the time out of your day to spend that **defined** quality time with your children. The more fun and connection you have as a family will also help to alleviate stress and make you and your children feel better overall. Here are my final parenting tips for when you're "Stuck at Home".

DO FUN ACTIVITIES WITH THE KIDS

Even though we're stuck at home, there are still so many activities you can do as a family and with your kids. Cherish these times. They can be challenging, but they can also be calming and create great memories. You can:

- Cook with them
- Bake with them
- Do arts and crafts — coloring, painting, drawing, etc
- Google a ton of "at home" games to do with the family (one of my favorites is [Melissa & Doug Family Dinner Box of Questions Game](#))
- Create NEW games yourself (get imaginative and inventive)
- Have conversations with them over dinner... conversations you might not have had normally
- Do fitness and yoga activities together

BE LENIENT WITH SCREEN TIME:

These days you're supposed to work, school, and parent from home while your kids are bored and antsy... It's okay to be lenient with screen time. Just know that there will be times you have to give in and the kids may have to watch a movie or go on the iPad.

Even though it might be 1-hour per day normally, you might now do 2-hours of iPad use. Rather than just being stressed, and your kid having a tantrum, you can give yourself some leniency and let them use more screen time (but make sure to explain to them so they know this will go back to normal after the quarantine/shelter-at-home times).

MAKE A BOREDOM LIST:

Create a "boredom list" of fun activities they can do whenever they are bored. For my family, we went through everything in their entire room, found things we liked, made a giveaway pile of things we no longer wanted, and we then made a list (for each child and for the family) of all the activities that we have at home to do when the "I'm bored" happens which we all know seems like all.the.time. Next time your kids come up to you and say "we're bored!" you can make sure they double check their Boredom List and see what fun activities they can do.

MORE TIPS ON NEXT PAGE! →

SEPARATE YOUR WORK, WHEN POSSIBLE:

When you're working and if it is a time that you really can't be interrupted (unless of course urgent), try and put a sign on the door "Mommy Has a Meeting". You don't ever want to lock a kid out of a room, but you somehow have to create a boundary that you're on a serious call (little kids may not listen, but older kids can understand that mommy is busy working).

Even if it doesn't work, you want to build the habit and recognition that there are times that mommy is busy or focusing on work stuff. It can buy you some time and space to do work.

That said, I want to reiterate here the need for also making and scheduling that quality time with your children. They need you more than ever now. You cannot be expected to do everything so the quality time you put in is by far better than trying to multitask throughout the day.

OPEN UP WITH YOUR KIDS:

Lastly, even if kids say they don't want to talk, it is important to continue the communication with them. Try to talk to your kids even if they seem like they won't open up. They will usually end up talking.

Kids are looking to you to feel safe. Talk with your kids even if they won't open up. My daughter can be a "tough NYer gal" and always act like she doesn't want to talk at first... but then she opens up and starts sharing. It is wonderful the things my children share with me. Kids, like adults, need connection too, especially now.

Create and cultivate this time of connection, even if it feels like you're around each other all the time.

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

This final one is big. It is more important than ever to focus on daily gratitude and being thankful. It's totally normal and okay to feel anxious, sad and stressed during this time. As hard as this sounds, practicing gratitude and thanks is good for you both mentally and physically.

Research has shown that practicing gratitude can improve your quality of life and produce many health benefits. Benefits include improving your immune system, helping you cope with stress better, being more optimistic, experiencing less insomnia, and being more likely to exercise (to name just a few). It is also known that those that practice gratitude are more likely to be generous and empathic to others.

So how to do it? It takes just a little extra effort and just a couple minutes a day to think about or write down what you are grateful for each day. You can try a morning or nighttime journal and write down 1-3 things a day you are grateful for that day and in life. Sometimes it helps to think about what it would be like without those positives in your life. Notice the goodness in your life. Volunteer. Do little good deeds and send people gifts and notes of thanks.

MORE TIPS ON NEXT PAGE! →

Finally, stay positive the best you can.

I know parents are feeling overwhelmed, but we're all in this together. We can do this. And we can boost our immunity, live with less stress, and sleep better through the process.

Knowing and acknowledging that you can't do it all—and even if you just do a little bit at a time—will really make an impact. And knowing that your kids are watching you, really helps too.

The calmer and less anxious you are, the more calm and less stressed your child will be. Try to enjoy the quality time you have, as hard as it is. I get it. Working full time, having kids, everyone in the same house...and the stress of the unknowns with the pandemic.

One day this will all be behind us. The best thing you can do is try to enjoy this quality time you wouldn't necessarily have had together.

So make sure to focus on those things: *boosting your immunity, getting good sleep, exercising, eating nutritious food, reducing stress, and spending quality time with your kids.*

Wishing you health and good family times.

Best,

Dr Alison

Want more tips on family wellness, health, sleep, fitness, nutrition, and how to be a happy and fit mom?

Go to my website for more of my articles, blogs, and resources!

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