How do I prevent emotional or boredom eating?

Are you finding that your child is wanting to eat more than their usual three nutritious meals and a healthy snack each day? If so, then check out the tips and pointers below to prevent them from overeating while staying at home.
PHYSICAL HUNGER
Your child may request additional food purely because of physical hunger. Sugary or high carbohydrate foods, such as chips, cause a spike in blood sugar levels, and those levels drop rapidly, causing your child to feel hungry again much sooner. So eating certain snack foods can actually make your child eat more.

TO HELP IN THIS SITUATION, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING TIPS:
• **Avoid certain food types:** Try not to buy food that is high in sugar or carbohydrates. If you already have them and can’t bear to throw out food, put them in a box, up high, and talk to your child about when they are allowed to have them (eg weekend afternoons only).
• **Provide healthy snack options:** Having a selection of healthy snacks on hand will help – hummus and carrot sticks, butter-free popcorn or fruit. Also remember that saying no is OK and that setting boundaries for your child, especially in these rapidly changing times, may help them to feel more secure.
• **Set meal/snack times:** Try to set meal/snack times at the same time as if your child was going to day care or school.
• **Plan:** Consider planning meals in advance. While at school, your child simply gets what is in their lunchbox, and they wouldn’t have the option of anything that is in the fridge. Perhaps put a roster on the fridge so that your child can see the planned meal options and involve them in the planning process. This will make your child feel more committed to the roster as well as giving them a sense of self-efficacy or control.

BOREDOM/EMOTIONAL HUNGER
Children, like adults, often eat for reasons other than being hungry. It can help to try and identify why your child is asking for food – that is, what were they doing just before they asked for food?
• Has it been a couple of hours of doing schoolwork?
• Are they transitioning from one activity to another and finding it hard to get started on the next?
• Have they finished one activity and don’t know what to do next?
• Have they just heard something stressful or been thinking about something that provoked feelings of sadness or worry?

SOME TIPS ON HOW TO MANAGE EMOTIONAL EATING INCLUDE:
• **Plan regular scheduled breaks:** As well as planning regular breaks, plan what your child will do during those breaks. It might be popping outside for some fresh air, doing some stretches or walking around the block.
• **Manageable chunks:** If your child is finding it hard to get started on new tasks, it can help to break the task down into more manageable chunks. Write down the steps involved so that they don’t have to hold the information in mind, and they will find it rewarding to tick off the steps as they are completed.
• **Listen:** If your child’s eating is prompted by negative emotions, it could help to listen and talk through those emotions. If you are concerned, seek professional assistance and take advantage of the expert help on offer. Psychologists can help children deal with their feelings, and there are many online and telehealth resources for this. Dietitians can help identify your child’s eating habits and assist you in developing a diet plan.