

Etiquette tips in the era of parties that happen on a screen

By Jessica Roy
Los Angeles Times

We have all suddenly and somewhat unwillingly been ushered into the age of the social video call. Yes, we’ve all been on a few video conferences for work here and there — a necessary evil of remote teams and global businesses. But this is the first time we’ve all found ourselves celebrating birthdays, baby showers, engagements and even weddings with our friends and family com-

pacted into boxes on a screen. The ink was barely dry on the shutdown orders last month before people started organizing happy hours, game nights, book clubs, watch parties, brunches and other gatherings online. The age of social distancing has proved to be remarkably social. But there’s a bit of a learning curve to using video conferencing, even if you’ve done it for work before. The etiquette and expectations are a little different

when you’re just vibing with your friends — but they still exist. There’s a lot of overlap between pro tips for using Zoom, Skype or Google Hangouts for work and with your friends. (Full disclosure: Times owner Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong is an investor in Zoom.) If you’ve never joined or set up a video call before, our ultimate guide to hanging out with your friends online has instructions. Once you’re ready to attain the next level of

video-conferencing capabilities, come back here. Using your laptop is better than your phone. You’ll quickly discover that holding a phone up at face height for an extended period of time is no fun. The video and sound quality tend to be lower coming from your phone. Also, if you have your laptop set up on a table in front of you, it’s easier to eat and drink. It also makes it feel a little more natural if you need to get up — like you’re

just pushing your chair back from the table at a dinner party instead of making everyone else stare at your ceiling as your phone sits face-up while you refill your drink. With Zoom, gallery view is better than speaker video. With speaker video, the person who’s making the most noise is a big picture, while everyone else is in a little bar at the side or along the top.

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SNACKING

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Make a list of five things that relax you, such as reading a magazine or playing with your kids; five things that distract you; five people you can call and connect with; five things that soothe your senses, such as turning down the lights or trading jeans for sweat pants; and five places you can go for comfort, such as a garden or your favorite chair.

Learn, too, the difference between emotional and physical hunger. The former comes on suddenly and craves a specific comfort food; the latter grows more gradually and stops when your stomach is full.

Bringing healthier foods into the home is a positive first step — think popcorn instead of cookies or flavored yogurt or low-cal ice cream bars instead of full-fat ice cream, for instance. Also, think about retooling recipes for your favorite snacks so they contain more of the good stuff, like protein, healthy fats and less sugar. Sate a sweet tooth not with a sugary cookie but a nutritious energy bar flavored with ginger and molasses. It’s a runner’s favorite, thanks to the carbs, and is equally good with a cup of coffee as a glass of milk.

And finally, while carrot sticks, whole-grain crackers and sliced veggies make for healthful snacking, they can also feel like you’re on a diet. So how about you pair them with a tasty, nutritious dip. Chickpeas, a main ingredient in hummus, are chock-full of

key nutrients, such as B vitamins, calcium and iron, and they also provide fiber. We’ve got recipes for the above, as well as one for a guilt-free mocktail to enjoy after a hard day in your (home) office. Crafted with cucumber, citrus, mint and seltzer, it’s so refreshing and because there’s no alcohol, you don’t even have to wait until it’s five o’clock somewhere to enjoy it.

CUCUMBER-MINT SPRITZER

This refreshing alcohol-free spritzer, perfect for sipping on the porch or deck after a work-from-home day, has just 12 calories.

- 2 mini cucumbers or ½ large cucumber
- 8 leaves fresh mint, plus sprigs for garnish
- 2 lemons or limes
- 12 ounces lemon or regular seltzer
- Ice cubes

Slice cucumber(s) into thin ribbons using a mandoline or vegetable peeler. Place in a large mason jar or small pitcher, reserving some for glasses. Add mint leaves and gently muddle. Squeeze juice from 1 ½ lemons (or limes) into the pitcher, reserving the other half for garnish. Stir in seltzer. Fill 2 cocktail glasses with ice. Pour drink over ice and garnish with mint sprigs, cucumber ribbons and lemon (or lime) slices, if desired. Makes 2 drinks.

CLASSIC HUMMUS

This nutritious and creamy Middle Eastern dip is low in sodium and high in protein. I like it with a lot of lemon and cumin, but you also could add more garlic, roasted red pepper, paprika, cayenne, cilantro, jalapeno or anything else you like. If it’s too thick, add a little more oil, lemon juice or water to taste. Serve with fresh veggies, whole-grain crackers, toasted pita chips or tortilla chips. Hummus also makes a nice substitute for mayo on sandwiches and in wraps.

- 1 can (15 ounces) chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- Juice of 1 to 2 large lemons
- 1 or 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- ½ cup tahini, well mixed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- Paprika and/or chopped parsley, for garnish

Combine chickpeas, lemon juice, garlic, tahini, salt and cumin in a food processor. Puree the hummus for several minutes until it is smooth and well mixed. Season with pepper, then drizzle in 3 tablespoons olive oil. Continue pureeing until the hummus is super creamy. You may have to add a little water if it’s too thick. To serve, spoon hummus into a shallow bowl, dust with paprika and/or parsley and drizzle with a little more olive oil.

Makes about 1½ cups. Serve with baby carrots, sliced vegetables, crackers, toasted pita or rice crackers.

DARK CHOCOLATE AVOCADO PUDDING

Avocados provide healthy fat and make this pudding super satiating. You can play with the recipe by adding a little ginger, cinnamon or cayenne pepper. If you’ve got cocoa nibs, they make a lovely and crunchy garnish. Substitute almond or coconut milk for the yogurt and skim milk for a vegan treat.

- 2 small ripe avocados, pitted and scooped from skin
- 1/3 cup plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup skim milk
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ cup maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt
- Ground ginger, cinnamon or cayenne pepper, optional
- Whipped cream, berries and/or cocoa nibs, for garnish

In a food processor, combine avocados, yogurt, milk, cocoa powder, maple syrup, vanilla, salt and spice(s), if using. Process until very smooth. Refrigerate until chilled. Serve in individual bowls, either alone or parfait style, layered with whipped cream and berries.

GINGER AND MOLASSES ENERGY BARS

The key to a good snack is to combine protein, carbs and fat to help you feel satiated, writes registered dietitian Charlie Watson in “Cook, Eat, Run,” a cookbook for runners. These energy bars taste like an Archway cookie.

- ½ cup old-fashioned oats
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- ¼ teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup vegetable or avocado oil
- 2½ tablespoons molasses
- ¾ cup light brown sugar
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons chopped candied ginger, optional

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and line an 8-inch square baking pan with parchment paper. In large bowl, mix together oats, flour, cloves, cinnamon, ginger and baking soda. In separate bowl, whisk together oil, molasses, brown sugar and egg. Pour wet ingredients into dry and stir to combine; the mixture will be thick. Spoon mixture into prepared pan and spread into corners. Sprinkle candied ginger on top, if using. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes,

until top is golden and crisp and middle is just set. Leave to cool in pan then cut into 24 squares. Will keep for up to five days in an airtight container. Makes 24 squares.

CRISPY CHICKPEAS

If you love snacks with crunch, these toasted chickpeas will make you happy. They’re loaded with fiber, zinc, folate and protein and also are gluten-free and vegan. Feel free to experiment with a variety of spices.

- 1 can (15 ounces) chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Pour chickpeas onto a clean kitchen towel or paper towels and thoroughly pat dry. Place chickpeas in bowl, and toss with oil and spices. Transfer to baking sheet and spread out in single layer. Bake for 20 minutes, stir and return to oven for 10 more minutes or until extra crispy. Allow chickpeas to cool completely before serving. Makes 1 cup.

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