

# EATING WELL

## During and After COVID-19 Illness

### Advice for Adult Patients and Carers

COVID-19 (coronavirus disease-2019) is an infectious disease, which can cause symptoms of fever, coughing, general weakness, pain, difficulty breathing as well as changes to taste and smell. Eating well and maintaining a healthy weight is important to maintain your strength and fitness to ensure that your body has enough nutrients (energy, protein, vitamins and minerals) to help protect you from infection and recover from illness.

Eating well can be difficult during COVID-19, as your routine may be disrupted and you may have difficulty shopping for the foods you normally eat. This leaflet provides important tips to help you to eat well during and after COVID-19 illness. If you have recently been very unwell, have a poor appetite or have lost weight without meaning to, the yellow information leaflet "Improving Your Nutrition During and After COVID-19 Illness" may be helpful. This provides information about how to make the most of your food, which can be found at <https://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/covid19yellow.pdf> Consider speaking to your GP or nurse if you have concerns.

### Tips for Monitoring Your Weight

It is important to think about your weight. Being overweight or being underweight is not good for your overall health and can impact on your risk of becoming ill from COVID-19 and on your recovery. Use your current weight and height to calculate your body mass index (BMI). The NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/> can help you do this, or you can use the self-screening tool at <https://www.malnutritionselfscreening.org> If your BMI is above 25 and you are thinking of losing weight, doing this during or straight after an illness may not be the best time. Instead, wait until you have recovered fully. Discuss with your healthcare professional when would be the best time for you to lose weight.

### Tips for a Healthy Balanced Diet

The Eatwell guide below gives you information about what to eat to ensure you are getting a balanced diet:



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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## Protein Foods

For healthy strong muscles and the immune system

- Try to eat protein foods two to three times a day, e.g. at meals or in snacks (if you are over 65 years of age or have a pre-existing medical condition try to eat a portion of protein rich food at each meal)
- Foods that provide us with protein include: meat, fish, eggs, dairy products (e.g. yogurt, milk, cheese), beans, lentils, nuts and tofu
- Aim to eat at least 1 portion of oily fish each week such as mackerel, salmon, sardines or pilchards
- For more information on protein rich foods see <https://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/proteinideas.pdf>

## Carbohydrate Foods

For energy

- Try to include a starchy food at each meal
- Foods that are starchy include potatoes, bread, pasta, rice and cereals – choose wholegrain versions where possible for extra fibre

## Fruit and Vegetables

For fibre and essential vitamins and minerals to support your immune system

- We should include plenty of fruit and vegetables in our diets - aim for at least 5 portions a day
- Your fruit and vegetables can be fresh, frozen, canned - they all count
- Consider a multivitamin and mineral supplement if you are struggling with your fruit and vegetable intake
- Spend some time outdoors each day if you can and consider taking a vitamin D supplement whilst you are self-isolating at home. In the UK a supplement of 10 micrograms of vitamin D a day is recommended

## Dairy Foods

Contain calcium and other minerals for strong bones and teeth

- Try to include a portion of dairy food in your diet 3 times per day
- Dairy foods include milk, yogurt, cheese and fromage frais – lower fat versions are still good sources of calcium but may be more suitable if you're watching your weight
- Non-dairy foods providing some of the same important nutrients, including leafy green vegetables, beans (e.g. kidney beans), chickpeas (e.g. hummus), nuts (e.g. almonds), seeds (e.g. sesame), fruit (e.g. oranges, dried figs) and tinned fish with bones, e.g. salmon or sardines

## High Energy Foods

- High energy foods are the ones to think about restricting if you are trying to manage or reduce your weight
- They tend to contain a lot of calories but don't provide many of the important nutrients for your body – try to cut back on these foods
- High energy foods are those that are high in fat (e.g. chips, fried foods, meat pies), high in sugar (e.g. fizzy drinks, sweets), or high in both sugar and fat (e.g. chocolate, cream cakes)
- If you have diabetes high sugar foods should be limited. Blood glucose control is important for long term health but also helps avoid infection

## Fluid

- Have regular drinks throughout the day to help you stay hydrated
- Check your urine colour. Dark urine is a sign of dehydration. Aim to drink enough fluid to keep urine a pale straw colour
- We should aim to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid each day: water, low fat milk, fruit juices, sugar free drinks, tea and coffee all count
- Fruit juice contains a lot of sugar and so should be limited to a glass (150ml) per day

## Tips for Getting the Foods You Need

Social distancing, isolation and feeling unwell can make it difficult to go shopping for the foods you need.

- Include convenience foods (such as tinned, dried or frozen foods) in your weekly shop as these will last longer e.g. long-life milk, savoury snacks, plain biscuits, rice puddings, corned beef, baked beans, soups, tinned puddings and custard. Useful store cupboard ideas can be found at <https://www.bda.uk.com/uploads/assets/275073a5-06cc-473fb-349ca768124e72f/200406-BDA-OPSG-Store-cupboard-Flier-V2-A4-version.pdf>
- Use meals on wheels services or home delivery services offering pre-prepared meals
- Arrange to eat regularly with a friend or family member using video calls
- If you are self-isolating, ask family, friends or your carer for help with shopping, or ordering food for home delivery
- Ask family, friends or your carer for support with technology to be able to connect via social media, phone or video calls
- If you are struggling ask to be assessed for a package of care (contact your local social services department)
- People with certain medical conditions may be considered as extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 and eligible for priority supermarket deliveries. Visit <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable> for more information about how to register as a vulnerable person

## Tips for Managing Changes to Taste and Smell

Changes to your taste and smell are common symptoms of COVID-19 and can make eating and drinking less enjoyable.

- Experiment with herbs, spices, pepper, chutneys and pickles in cooking
- If you are struggling with the strong taste of hot foods, try cold foods instead
- If you go off a particular food, try it again regularly as your tastes may continue to change

## Exercise

- Exercise can reduce your risk of major illnesses, keep muscles strong and can keep you agile
- It can also boost self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy levels, as well as reducing your risk of stress and depression
- Adults should try to be active daily and aim for at least 150 minutes of physical activity over a week through a variety of activities. Choose the exercises you enjoy.
- Exercising whilst social distancing can seem more challenging – consider walking in the garden or open green spaces, dancing at home with the family, or taking part in online exercise classes.

## Diabetes

If you have diabetes, you may be at increased risk of becoming poorly from COVID-19, which in turn may affect your blood sugar control. Visit [https://www.diabetes.org.uk/about\\_us/news/coronavirus](https://www.diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/coronavirus) for information about diabetes and COVID-19.

### Further Information

British Dietetic Association - COVID-19 / Coronavirus - Advice for the General Public

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/covid-19-corona-virus-advice-for-the-general-public.html>

Please note - the information in this leaflet should not replace any individual advice given to you by a qualified healthcare professional.



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[www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/covid-19](http://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/covid-19)

This information has been compiled by a multi-professional panel (see [www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/about-us](http://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/about-us)), it is largely derived from the Managing Malnutrition in COPD and Managing Malnutrition in the Community patient materials and takes into account what we know about patients with COVID-19 to date. It is relevant for use in the UK. Costs of the production of this leaflet were met by an unrestricted educational grant from Nutricia Advanced Medical Nutrition

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