

# Eating well during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic

## Dietary information for patients

What you eat and drink can play a crucial role in your health and how you feel.

Although no specific food or supplement will prevent you from catching COVID-19 (coronavirus) or any other virus, maintaining a balanced nourishing diet will support your overall health and immune function. No one food is recommended over another; what is important is eating a variety of foods to get a range of nutrients.

If you have lost weight without trying or have a poor appetite, eating a nourishing, high energy, high protein diet is especially important as malnutrition can make it harder to recover from infections. People can struggle with their appetite for a variety of reasons but older people and those who are socially isolated can find it particularly difficult. This is because it can be more difficult to cook meals or to access the shops. People tend to eat more when they are in company.

This leaflet focuses on giving some guidance on how to make your diet more nourishing when you have a poor appetite. It also has some tips for making the most of the food that you buy and includes details of organisations that can help if you need support to access food.

## Ideas to help increase the amount of energy and protein you eat in a day

- Eat 'little and often' – include snacks between meals and a dessert after your lunch and evening meal.
- Have high energy snacks including nuts, crackers with cheese, a scone or pancake with butter, full fat yogurt, chocolate mousse, cake with a glass of milk, bread sticks or crisps with dips.
- Avoid drinks just before meals to avoid feeling too full to eat.
- Avoid low fat or diet products. Choose full fat yogurt, full fat or whole milk, creamy soups, and high energy ready meals.
- If you struggle with main meals, try to have two or more lighter meals as well as breakfast.
- Nourishing drinks can help top up your calories and protein – you can sip these throughout the day at your own pace (see section below for more information).
- Keep store cupboard items for meals that are easy to prepare for when you are tired. eg tinned meat or fish, baked beans, eggs, creamy soups, macaroni cheese, jacket potatoes, tinned potatoes, tinned fruit and vegetables, nut butters, jar or packet sauces, Angel Delight/instant whip, rice pudding, custard.

- A lighter, easy to prepare meal might be:
  - toast with baked beans, eggs, tinned fish, cheese or peanut butter
  - soup with a roll – you can add tinned beans, grated cheese or enriched milk
  - omelette with ham, cheese, vegetables
  - peanut butter or cream cheese on crumpets, teacakes, croissant, bagel
  - finger food eg quiche, pizza, sausages, vegetable sticks with dips or hummus
  - sandwich or jacket potato with egg, chicken, tuna mayonnaise or cheese

## Making the most of your freezer

- When you feel well, batch cook and freeze extra portions so you have meals to use when you feel less able to cook.
- Keep some convenience foods for times when you are too tired to cook eg a variety of ready meals, fish fingers, breaded fish or chicken and chips.
- Frozen fruit and vegetables can reduce waste if you find fresh items go off easily.
- Wrap meat and fish in individual portions in cling film or plastic bags, so you can cook them one at a time.
- Bread and baked products freeze well. You can toast slices of bread from frozen; slice bread rolls and bagels before you freeze them as they're easier to toast.
- Use grated cheese straight from the freezer, it will keep for up to four months.

## Add extra energy by adding high calorie ingredients to food and drinks:

Add cheese* to:	Add skimmed milk powder to:	Add sugar*, jam or honey to:	Add ground almonds or nut butter to:
Soups, mashed potato, scrambled egg, baked beans, vegetables, creamy sauces	Milk (see below for how to make enriched milk), porridge, mashed potato, sauces, custard, creamy soups	Cereal or porridge, puddings, hot drinks, milkshakes and smoothies, glazed vegetables	Porridge, vegetable soups, sauces, smoothies

Other high calorie ingredients you can add to your foods are evaporated milk, soft cheese, butter, salad cream, mayonnaise, vegetable oils.

\*If there are health concerns which have previously required you to limit fat and sugar in your diet eg diabetes or high cholesterol, please discuss whether you still need to limit these with your hospital dietitian, the doctor managing your care in hospital or your GP. It may be that you need to increase high fat and high sugar foods while you are unwell and return to your normal diet once you are feeling and eating better.

## How to make enriched milk:

1. Measure one pint/600ml of full fat milk into a jug
2. Add four heaped tablespoons of skimmed milk powder (we recommend supermarket own brand or Marvel)



3. Mix with a fork or whisk until combined
4. Keep refrigerated, use within 24 hours
5. Use throughout the day as you would normal milk – in hot drinks, on cereals, sauces, to make custard or other milk based puddings

### **Keeping hydrated and nourishing drinks**

Good hydration can reduce the risk of many things eg constipation, falls and urine infections. Aim for 8-10 cups of fluids per day (1.5-2 litres). Drink fluids that you enjoy. Water, milk, fruit juice, tea, coffee and soft drinks all count towards your total fluid intake.

Nourishing drinks can be a good way to increase your calorie intake if you are struggling to eat well. Try full fat milk, shop bought milkshakes, smoothies, milky hot chocolate and fruit juice. You might also find over-the-counter high energy drinks such as Meritene®, Complian® or Nurishment® helpful, or if you are vegan, Huel® or other protein powders mixed with a vegan milk alternative.



Your GP or dietitian may recommend that you take a prescribed nutritional product. Where you can, try to be inventive with these – add them to porridge, use to make Angel Delight, freeze them in ice lolly moulds or mix with your favourite ice cream to make a milkshake. For most people these are a short term measure – if after two months you are still receiving nutritional products on prescription please speak to your GP or dietitian to discuss if they are still required.

### **Eating and breathlessness (advice from the British Lung Foundation)**

Some medical conditions can make you feel very breathless and this can make eating a lot more difficult.

- If you struggle to chew and breathe when you eat, go for softer, moist foods that are easier to chew and swallow.
- Try having more nourishing liquids such as milk, smoothies, juice and soups.
- Breathing can sometimes become harder after eating a large meal. Try eating smaller meals and snacks more often.
- Take time when you eat. Try to swallow every mouthful before going on to the next.

### **Fruit and vegetables**

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins and fibre so it is important to try to include them in your diet where you can. Where possible, add calories eg tinned or fresh fruit with cream, grated cheese, butter or oil on cooked vegetables, mayonnaise, salad cream or olive oil on salad, or cream with vegetable soup.

### **Vitamin D**

Vitamin D helps to keep our bones, muscles and teeth healthy. In normal circumstances, sunshine, not food, is where most of your vitamin D comes from. All adults should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D during winter. If you need to self-isolate or if you are unable to go outside, you should consider taking a daily 10 microgram vitamin D supplement throughout spring and summer too (for adults and children).

## Swallowing difficulties

After leaving hospital you may find eating is an effort or painful for a short time. Soft and moist foods may be easier. Eat small amounts regularly if you get tired and if you have persistent difficulties or experience coughing or choking, or a sensation of food or drink going down the wrong way, please speak to your GP.

If you have received advice from a speech and language therapist about the texture of your food and drink, continue to follow their advice. You can still follow the principles discussed in this leaflet to ensure that you are eating well.

## Community services

Below are a list of services that can offer help with food shopping and other practical support:

### Barnet Council Community Help Hub

Telephone: 080 8281 3210 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Or fill out an online form: [engage.barnet.gov.uk/communityhelphub](https://engage.barnet.gov.uk/communityhelphub)

### High Barnet Good Neighbour Scheme (EN5 postcode area)

Telephone: 020 8441 5678 (Monday to Friday, 10am-1pm)

Website: [www.goodneighbourscheme.org/](http://www.goodneighbourscheme.org/)

### Helping Hands – Barnet

Telephone: 020 8275 8378

Email: [helpinghands@fin-eastbarnet.org.uk](mailto:helpinghands@fin-eastbarnet.org.uk)

### Camden Council

Website: [www.camden.gov.uk/covid-19](http://www.camden.gov.uk/covid-19)

### Enfield Council – Enfield Stands Together

Please note people over 70 and people extremely vulnerable to coronavirus are prioritised.

Telephone: 020 3821 1966 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am-4.30pm, and Saturday to Sunday, 10am-2pm)

Website: [new.enfield.gov.uk/services/your-council/enfield-stands-together/](http://new.enfield.gov.uk/services/your-council/enfield-stands-together/)

### Hertfordshire County Council – HertsHelp

Telephone: 0300 123 4044

Website: [www.hertshelp.net/our-services/tell-us-about-someone-who-needs-help.aspx](http://www.hertshelp.net/our-services/tell-us-about-someone-who-needs-help.aspx)

### Age UK

Barnet telephone line: 020 8203 5040

Camden telephone line: 020 7239 0400

UK wide helpline: 020 8364 8600

### British Red Cross Hospital and Community Support Project

Phone: 020 8944 0246

Website: [london\\_enquiries@redcross.org.uk](mailto:london_enquiries@redcross.org.uk)

### On Hand

Doorstep drop-offs for food shops, prescriptions and out of home errands.

Telephone: 020 3488 2912  
Website: [www.beonhand.co.uk/](http://www.beonhand.co.uk/)

### **Trussell Trust**

A network of foodbanks which provides emergency food and support to people in crisis.  
Telephone: 01722 580 180

## **Companies that can deliver frozen meals to your home**

### **Oakhouse Foods**

Telephone: 0333 370 6700  
Website: [www.oakhousefoods.co.uk/](http://www.oakhousefoods.co.uk/)  
Includes a range of pureed (level 4) and soft and bite-sized meals (level 6).

### **Simply Food Solutions**

Telephone: 0191 456 0456  
Website: [simplyfoodsolutions.co.uk/](http://simplyfoodsolutions.co.uk/)  
Includes modified texture meals (level 4, 5 and 6), traditional Indian meals, Halal meals, Kosher meals, Chinese and Afro-Caribbean meals.

### **Wiltshire Farm Foods**

They are only accepting orders from existing customers or the extremely vulnerable.  
Telephone: 0800 077 3100  
Website: [www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com/](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com/)

## **Other avenues of support**

### **Supermarkets**

Most supermarket chains offer online shopping services you can use if you are unable to get to the shops. Otherwise, please ask family or friends if they can help.

Many supermarkets are running protected times and online delivery slots to serve the elderly, disabled and vulnerable customers. Please check with your local supermarket for more details.

### **Covid-19 Mutual Aid**

Website: [covidmutualaid.org/local-groups/](http://covidmutualaid.org/local-groups/)  
Communication via Facebook groups to offer help to local residents

## **Advice for the extremely vulnerable**

Extremely vulnerable people are those who are at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (coronavirus) because of an underlying health condition.

People falling into this extremely vulnerable group include:

- Solid organ transplant recipients.
- People with specific cancers:
  - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
  - people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
  - people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment

- people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD.
- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
- Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

If you have a medical condition that makes you extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 (coronavirus), current government advice is that you should not leave your house or go out to get food shopping.

The government are encouraging people to register for the support that they need. Support includes help with food, shopping deliveries and any additional care you might need. Please register using this website: [www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable).

You can register yourself, or on behalf of someone else.

It may take time for any support offered through this service to arrive so where possible please ask family, friends and/or neighbours to support you and use online services if possible.

You may have received a letter from the NHS telling you that you are clinically extremely vulnerable or been contacted by your GP or hospital clinician. If this has not happened, please contact your GP or clinician after you register with this service.

### **British Dietetic Association (BDA)**

Thank you to the BDA for your help and support in producing this leaflet. Further evidence-based dietary advice can be found on their website: [www.bda.uk.com/](http://www.bda.uk.com/).



### **Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust**

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