



**EATING WELL  
AND BUILDING  
YOURSELF UP  
AFTER COVID-19**

**NHS**

**Kernow**

Clinical Commissioning Group

# Introduction

Nutrition and hydration play a very important role in how your body reacts to and recovers from COVID-19 (coronavirus). Eating a varied diet with a range of nutrients is important to support the immune system. However, there is no individual food, nutrient or supplement alone that will prevent us catching COVID-19 or help us recover from it.

This leaflet aims to help you meet your nutritional needs during and after COVID-19. It will provide some tips for eating well to manage any side-effects and support your recovery.

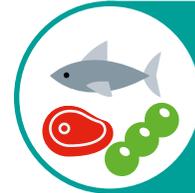
Although some of the food and drinks in this leaflet may usually be considered unhealthy, they are recommended until your appetite and weight improve.

If you are a healthy weight, overweight or obese, have a good appetite, and have not lost weight, then it is recommended that you eat regular meals based on [healthy eating guidelines](#).



# Tips for a balanced diet

For a balanced diet aim to eat foods from the following groups every day:



## Protein foods

For healthy muscles, organs and the immune system and recovery. Examples include meat, fish, eggs, dairy products, beans, peas and lentils, soya and tofu.

## Starchy carbohydrate foods

For energy and fibre. Examples include potatoes, bread, breakfast cereals, pasta and rice.



## Fruits and vegetables

For vitamins, minerals and fibre and to support the immune system. Aim for five portions a day. Fresh, frozen or tinned all count.

## Dairy and alternatives

For calcium and protein, healthy bones and teeth. Examples include milk, yogurt and cheese.



## Fats and oils

Try plant-based oils and spreads, such as olive oil, rapeseed oil or vegetable oils.

If you have been very unwell, continue to have a poor appetite or have lost weight without meaning to, the following advice can help increase your intake and prevent further weight loss.



## Fortified milk recipe

- Mix four heaped tablespoons of skimmed milk powder into one pint of full-fat (whole) milk.
- Stir well.

You can use in tea and coffee, hot chocolate, malted milk drinks, milkshakes, on cereal, in sauces, cooking, baking and making puddings.

## Protein

Protein is very important after illness to help improve your muscle strength and function. Spread your protein foods over the day. Try to include protein as part of every meal and snack. To help you have more protein:

- **Red or white meat, e.g. beef, lamb, pork, chicken, ham**  
If you are having difficulty chewing meat try using mince. Serve with sauce or gravy. For convenience use sliced ham, corned beef, luncheon meat or pate.
- **Fish**  
Try poached, steamed, boil in the bag or bake and try adding sauces.
- **Eggs**  
Poached, scrambled, boiled, omelette or frittata, egg custard.
- **Dairy foods**  
Yoghurt: full-fat flavoured or natural yoghurts, Greek yoghurt, Fromage Frais. Cheese: all types including cream cheese and cottage cheese.
- **Plant-based sources of protein**  
Soy and tofu, including soya mince and Quorn
- **Beans and pulses**  
Beans, including baked beans, butter beans, kidney beans, borlotti beans, chickpeas, hummous, black-eyed peas, garden peas and red, green, brown and yellow lentils
- **Nuts and seeds**  
If you have difficulty with whole nuts and seeds, ground nuts and nut butters, e.g. peanut butter or almond butter are good sources of protein
- **Milk**  
Milky drinks can be a good way of getting extra protein between meals and before bed. Aim for one pint fortified milk each day in place of normal milk.

For more information:

[www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/proteinideas.pdf](http://www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/proteinideas.pdf)

## How do I add more energy and protein?

If you have a small appetite or are losing weight, fortifying your food can help add more energy (calories) and protein to your meals and snacks.

If you have:	Fortify by adding:
Cereal or porridge	Full-fat or full-cream milk, fortified milk, skimmed milk powder, cream, full-fat or Greek yoghurt, ground nuts, honey, syrup, sugar, jam, pureed fruit
Scrambled eggs	Fortified milk, grated cheese, butter or spread
Sauces	Grated cheese, skimmed milk powder, ground nuts or nut butters, yoghurt, cream, butter or spreads, evaporated milk
Soups and stews	Grated cheese, skimmed milk powder, chopped meat, beans or pulses, ground nuts or nut butters, cream, crème fraiche, dumplings, croutons, beans, lentils, peas, rice
Mashed potato	Try mashing with fortified milk, add grated cheese, butter or oil, skimmed milk powder, cream, crème fraiche or pesto sauce
Cooked vegetables	Grated cheese, cream cheese, creamy sauces, olive oil, butter or spreads, mayonnaise, salad cream, pesto sauce, yoghurt, peanut butter
Sandwiches, pittas and bagels	Try high protein filling such as meat, cheese, fish or peanut butter. Add extra butter or margarine, mayonnaise, salad cream, cream cheese or cheese spread
Salads	Grated cheese, olive oil or salad dressing, mayonnaise or salad cream
Custard and milky puddings	Use full-fat or full-cream milk or fortified milk, skimmed milk powder, double cream, evaporated or condensed milk, honey, syrup, sugar, jam or pureed fruit, chocolate sauce.



# Effects of COVID-19

You may experience some side-effects due to COVID-19 that can affect your eating and drinking. These include:

## Loss of appetite

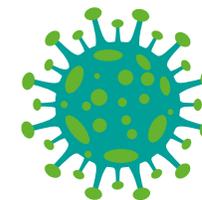
You may find your appetite is smaller or you feel full more quickly. Try the following tips:

- Use a smaller plate or bowl so meals look less overwhelming.
- Fresh air and gentle exercise may help stimulate your appetite
- Try not to have drinks just before meals to avoid feeling too full to eat.
- Choose meals that you enjoy, are easy to prepare and eat.
- Try to eat a variety of foods to make sure you are getting a range of nutrients.
- Instead of choosing food and drinks labelled as low fat, diet or fat-free, choose the non-diet or full-fat versions instead.

## Muscle weakness, extreme tiredness (fatigue) and shortness of breath

You may have lost weight and some of this will be loss of muscle. If you are feeling weak, very tired or short of breath, eating and drinking might require more effort and take longer than usual. Try the following tips:

- Eat little and often. Aim for three small meals and three snacks.
- Try softer, moist foods that don't require a lot of chewing.
- Try taking small mouthfuls and allow plenty of time for eating.
- Ask for help to prepare your meals if possible, or use ready-meals, tinned foods or a meal-delivery service if you are finding cooking tiring.
- Try having additional nourishing drinks between meals, such as milky drinks, homemade fortified milkshakes and soups, or juice.



## Swallowing difficulties

If you have problems with swallowing (dysphagia) and have been given advice from a speech and language therapist please continue to follow their advice concerning the texture of your food and drink.

## Dry mouth

If you have a dry mouth making eating more difficult the following tips may help:

- Keep your mouth clean and fresh, especially before and after your meals. Clean your teeth at least twice a day.
- Take regular sips of cold drinks throughout the day.
- Softer, moist foods may be easier to manage and try adding extra sauces to food.
- Sucking on sugar-free sweets, ice-cubes, ice-lollies or lemon may help.

## Taste changes

You may have a change in your sense of taste and smell after COVID-19, ranging from a bland taste to a metallic or salty taste. Try the following tips:

- Experiment with different flavours, textures and temperatures to see which you find more palatable.
- Try marinating meats with sweet/sour marinades, or using herbs and spices for seasoning.
- Add sauces such as apple sauce, mint sauce, cranberry sauce, horseradish, mustard, pickles, or processed/cream cheese.
- Sharp/tart flavoured foods and drinks, such as citrus flavours, oranges, lemons, limes, cranberry, boiled sweets and mints may help.
- If foods have a metallic taste, try plastic cutlery instead of metal.



## Staying hydrated

Getting enough fluid is essential for good health. Adults are usually advised to have 6 to 8 mugs or large glasses a day, about 1,600ml to 2000ml, but this may need to be higher if you have a high temperature, in warm weather and during physical activity.

All fluids, except alcohol, count towards your daily fluid intake. If your appetite isn't good include some [nourishing fluids](#) such as milky drinks, homemade fortified milkshakes and soups, or juice.



## Vitamins and minerals

You can get all the nutrients you need from a varied and balanced diet, but if you have a poor appetite you may wish to consider taking an A-Z multivitamin and mineral supplement until your appetite returns. These can be purchased from any pharmacy or supermarket.

## Vitamin D

Consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms vitamin D. This is because you may not be getting enough vitamin D from sunlight if you're indoors most of the day or you're self-isolating due to COVID-19.

[Find out more about vitamin D here.](#)

## Access to food

If you or someone you know is shielding due to having a medical condition that makes you extremely vulnerable to COVID-19, and you have [registered with the government](#), you will be able to access support for getting essential food supplies. To discuss your needs, contact Cornwall Council on **0300 123 1118** or email [covid19@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:covid19@cornwall.gov.uk).

If you are shielding or self-isolating and having difficulty getting food shopping, contact Volunteer Cornwall on **01872 266988** or email [requestforhelp@volunteercornwall.org.uk](mailto:requestforhelp@volunteercornwall.org.uk).

You may have family, friends or neighbours to support you or use online services or food-delivery services. Find out more on our website: [www.kernowccg.nhs.uk/your-health/nutrition](http://www.kernowccg.nhs.uk/your-health/nutrition)



## Self-screening

You can keep an eye on your progress at home using self-screening tools.

- [BAPEN malnutrition self-screening tool](#) (if you are able to weigh yourself).
- [The Patients Association nutrition checklist](#) (if you are unable to weigh yourself).

If you continue to have difficulty with eating and drinking, are losing weight or have any concerns please contact your dietitian, GP or other healthcare professional to discuss.

## Oral nutritional supplements

You may have been prescribed special nutritional drinks or 'oral nutritional supplements' (ONS), until you can able to eat enough to meet your nutritional needs.

It is important that you take the recommended dose and if you cannot manage the drinks or dose you have been prescribed please contact your dietitian or GP. They are not intended as a meal replacement and should be taken in addition to meals and snacks.

Please be aware that the drinks prescribed for you at home may be different to the ones you had in hospital. The need for ongoing prescription will be reviewed by your dietitian, GP or other healthcare professional.

Designed and produced by NHS Kernow  
May 2020

If you have any questions about information in this leaflet,  
please email [kccg.prescribing@nhs.net](mailto:kccg.prescribing@nhs.net)

