

# Covid-19

# Nutrition and

# Your Recovery



## Introduction

This information leaflet has been designed to support your recovery after Covid-19 (Coronavirus). Many people report experiencing a loss of appetite, taste and smell changes, tiredness or lethargy and an inability to cook and prepare their usual meals whilst unwell with or following Covid-19. All of which can lead to a poor food intake. This poor diet, combined with reduced physical activity, may cause weight loss, loss of muscle mass and a lack of strength.

The following information gives some advice and tips on ways to maximise your nutrition to re-gain strength and aid your recovery.

If you have specific nutrition needs, it is important that you continue to follow any dietary recommendations made by your dietitian or other healthcare professional, such as your GP.

## Healthy Eating

There are many nutrients that are involved with the normal functioning of the immune system, a healthy balanced diet is encouraged in order to support your immune function. One food is not recommended over another food to 'boost' your immune system, but instead eating a variety of foods is best.

The Eat Well Guide shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. It divides the foods we eat and drink into five main food groups. Try to choose a variety of different foods from each of the groups to help you get the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.



## Should I take Vitamin D supplement?

Vitamin D works with calcium and phosphorus for healthy bones, muscles and teeth. It is also important in protecting muscle strength, supporting a healthy immune function and preventing rickets, osteomalacia and falls.

In normal circumstances, sunshine, not food, is where most of your vitamin D comes from. During autumn and winter months when we spend more time indoors and the sun is weaker, adults and children over the age of one are advised to take a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (400IU) of Vitamin D. In the spring and summer months, if you can, you should seek to spend some time outdoors, with your arms and face exposed to the sun (e.g. your garden or balcony). Ethnic minority groups with dark skin, from African, Afro-Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds, may not get enough vitamin D from sunlight in the summer and therefore should consider taking a supplement all year round.

If you are unable to go outside, for example if you are self-isolating inside, you should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (400IU) to ensure a healthy vitamin D status. A viral infection like Covid-19 is likely to have left you at risk of Vitamin D deficiency so we would recommend a supplement to ensure you have sufficient levels to support your recovery. However if you are already taking a prescribed medicine or supplement you have bought, that contains vitamin D (sometime called colecalciferol) you should not take an additional vitamin D supplements. Please read the information leaflet that will

be included with any supplements or medicines you are taking and if you have any questions or concerns please ask your pharmacist or health professional.

Further information can be found on the NHS website [www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthybody/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthybody/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight)

## Hydration

It is important to consider your fluid intake as well as food to ensure good hydration. When you have been unwell your fluid requirements may be higher while you recover. 6-8x glasses of fluid (approximately 2L) a day is a good target to aim for.

Note: If you have been advised to restrict your fluids by a Healthcare Professional, please continue to do this.



## Maximising Calories and Protein

Weight loss and loss of muscle mass commonly affect those that have had an infection and/or a prolonged stay in hospital. Good nutrition, including eating enough protein and calories, can help the body to repair and rebuild.

If you have lost weight or are still suffering with a poor appetite the following tips may be useful. Incorporating 'food boosters' and nourishing drinks and snacks alongside your usual intake can help increase the calorie content of your diet and help stop further weight loss or start to restore your weight.

### General hints and tips

- Always use full fat and full sugar products (if you have diabetes please seek advice from your diabetes specialist. If you have a raised cholesterol and are taking medication please contact your GP who may need to adjust the medication whilst you are on a higher fat diet).
- Try to eat little and often, aim for every 2-3 hours
- Fresh air and gentle exercise before meals may help to stimulate your appetite
- If a large plate of food is overwhelming, try a smaller plate; you can always go back for more
- Freeze extra portions so you have meals available without needing to cook every day

## Food Boosters

The list of foods below provide approximately 100 calories each. They are examples of boosters that can be added to your normal meals to promote weight gain. Aim for at least three boosters per day.

Savoury options	Can be added to
A small matchbox-sized piece (30g) of Cheddar cheese	Toast, pasta, mashed/baked potato, soup, salad, beans, minced beef/Quorn dishes, crumpets, scones, chips.
1 tablespoon of peanut butter	Milkshake, toast, crumpets, sandwiches.
1 tablespoon of full fat mayonnaise	Salad, mashed potato, baked potato, chips, sandwiches.
1 tablespoon of oil	Salads, mashed potato, roast potatoes, chips, roasted veg,
2 cubes of butter	Bread, potatoes, crumpets, scones, vegetables.
2 tablespoons of pesto	Pasta, salad, vegetables, pizza, tomato based sauces, soups.
2 tablespoons of salad cream	Salad, mashed potato, baked potato, chips, sandwiches.
2 tablespoons of hummus	Vegetable sticks, bread sticks, crisps, salads, baked potatoes.

Sweet options	Can be added to
1 heaped tablespoon of sugar	Cereals, porridge, desserts.
1 small pot of full fat yoghurt	Fruit, pancakes, desserts, cakes.
1½ tablespoons of double cream	Porridge, desserts, milky drinks, cakes, fruit.
2 tablespoons of chocolate sauce	Porridge, desserts, milky drinks, fruit, pancakes
2 tablespoons of golden syrup	Porridge, desserts, cakes, fruit.
2 tablespoons of lemon curd	Porridge, desserts, cakes, fruit, sandwiches, toast
2 tablespoons of condensed milk/ evaporated milk	Porridge, desserts, milky drinks, cakes, fruit.
2 tablespoons of honey	Porridge, desserts, drinks, cakes, fruit, yoghurt.
2 scoops of ice cream	Fruit, pancakes, desserts, cakes.

### ***Fortified Milk using Skimmed milk powder\*:***

Skimmed milk powder, available in most supermarkets, is a cheap and effective way to increase your calorie and protein intake:

- Add 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to 1 pint of full cream milk and mix well. This can be used throughout the day in place of your usual milk.
- Add the skimmed milk powder to soups, mashed potato, white sauces, porridge, milky puddings, creamy dishes e.g. pasta bakes, fish pie, carbonara



\*If you do not eat or drink dairy products try using soya milk fortified with soya milk powder instead.

### Energy dense snacks

Try to have two snacks a day. Avoid having them near meal times in case this reduces your appetite for main meals.



- A small handful of dried fruit, nuts or seeds
- Small chocolate bar i.e. 2 fingers of KitKat
- Cheese, baked beans or sardines on one slice of toast
- Individual desserts i.e. crème caramels, rice puddings, custard, milk jellies, egg custards, Angel Delight
- Small bowl of cereal using fortified milk
- Peanut butter on toast
- Avocado on toast
- Cup-a-soup with added cream or milk powder
- Cheese and crackers
- 1 banana
- Half a croissant
- 1 slice of malt loaf
- A bag of crisps
- Hummus and crudities i.e. vegetable sticks, bread sticks
- Half a Hot cross bun with butter
- 2 Biscuits
- A hardboiled egg

## Nourishing Drinks

If you are unable to manage a meal, try to have a nourishing drink with a snack instead.

To make drinks more nourishing consider the following:

- Use full fat varieties of milk and cream
- Try adding whole or Greek yoghurt or ice cream to make smoothies
- Use Fortified milk
- Consider adding nut butters
- Consider adding fruit



Here are some recipes for you to try:

### ***Fruit Smoothie***

- 150ml carton fruit juice
- 1 mashed banana
- 3-4 tablespoons of tinned peaches in syrup
- 2 teaspoons of honey/maple syrup or sugar

***Approx. 260kcal and 2g protein***

### ***Iced Coffee Calypso***

- 200ml fortified milk
- 1-2 teaspoons instant coffee powder
- 2 teaspoons double cream or 1 scoop ice cream (iced coffee)
- sugar to taste

***Approx. 194kcal and 8g protein***

### **Banana Milkshake**

- 200ml fortified milk
  - 1 small banana mashed\*
  - 1-2 teaspoons of sugar (or honey/ maple syrup/ caramel sauce)
  - 60g or 1 scoop vanilla ice cream
- \*or pieces of fruit/berries\*, (e.g. 80g)

***Approx. 449kcal and 20g protein***

### **Chocolate Indulgence**

- 200ml fortified milk
- 1-2 tablespoons drinking chocolate
- 2 tablespoons of double cream
- 1 generous scoop of ice cream

***Approx. 300kcal and 17g protein***

**Tip:** for hot alternative heat milk and leave out ice cream  
(*approx. 230kcal and 17g protein*)

There are also many high calorie or high protein drinks available in supermarkets and pharmacies if you are unable to prepare a homemade nourishing drink or prefer something that is ready-to-drink.

## Managing Taste and Smell Changes

Many people have experienced taste changes or a lack of taste when unwell with Covid-19. Taste changes can be difficult to manage and require individual trial and error to find out what works.

There are five main tastes – Sweet, Salty, Bitter, Sour & Umami (savoury flavour: gravies/broths, cooked meats, cheese, yeast extracts, mushrooms).

Sense of smell is also something that has been reported to be affected by the virus. Our sense of smell is what contributes to tasting flavours. Taste and smell combine to provide our experience of flavour and when one or both become altered the pleasure of eating food diminishes.

Here are some useful tips:

- Cold food and drink – often soothing for a sore mouth but they also have less of a flavour which can be helpful for those experiencing taste alterations.
- Cleansing palate pre-meals – trying to keep the mouth as clean as possible will help with stimulating taste buds and remove any mucous or residue that may be affecting taste.
- Experiment with flavours i.e. sweet and sour, mint, garlic, vinegar and different seasoning. Try foods that are not in your 'normal' diet. Often people describe enjoying foods that they previously disliked. Foods that have the umami taste, such as mushrooms, soy sauce, marmite and hard cheeses such as parmesan, can

boost the other basic tastes. Umami is a flavour enhancer.

- Sharp fresh tasting foods such as lemon, lime and pineapple can stimulate taste buds, increase flow of saliva and get rid of bad taste in the mouth (but caution with sore mouths). They can add acidity to dishes which again can enhance flavour.
- Metallic taste – try using plastic cutlery, avoid tinned/canned products and avoid cooking in metal pans. Try adding honey/carrot/cinnamon to add sweetness which can counteract the metallic taste.
- Little and often approach and try foods that do not leave residue or an after taste.
- If you are worried, and if the problem is persisting, consult a Healthcare Professional to rule out any oral infections or dental problems might be causing changes in taste.

## **Painful Swallow or Discomfort Following Ventilation**

Some people have reported discomfort or soreness in their throats after being ventilated. Many people find these symptoms resolve naturally with time but for others it may cause difficulties in swallowing your normal diet.

Choosing foods that have a softer texture, with more moisture, are often easier to manage if your throat is still sore. Soft foods are tender and moist, require some chewing but are easily mashed with a fork. Some examples include:

### **Breakfast**

Porridge/Ready Brek or Weetabix with plenty of milk

Poached or scrambled eggs

Yoghurt

Soft, stewed or tinned fruit with yoghurt

### **Mains**

Inside of a jacket potato with a soft, moist filling i.e. egg  
mayonnaise, tuna mayonnaise

Cheese and potato pie

Omelette

Well-cooked Cauliflower or Broccoli cheese

Fish in white sauce/Fish pie

Cottage/Shepherds pie

Risotto

Stews/casseroles

Lasagne/pasta dishes with lots of sauce

## Puddings

Yoghurt/Mousse

Custard

Trifle

Ice cream

Milk puddings

Rice pudding

Tinned fruit

Steamed puddings

Mashed banana with custard or cream



If you are experiencing swallowing problems or episodes of coughing or choking when you are eating or drinking it is important to seek help from a Health Care Professional, such as your GP or a Speech and Language Therapist.

## Social Distancing

Social distancing and social isolation could impact a person's access to the wide variety of foods needed to keep healthy.

It is useful to have a store of basic items in your cupboard. Please see attached information for some store cupboard ideas.

If you have concerns cooking or shopping for yourself there are lots of food delivery companies that can deliver readymade meals and snacks. Some companies include:

### **Wiltshire Farm Foods**

Website: [www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com)

Tel: 0800 121 4233

### **Oak House Foods -**

Website: [www.oakhousefoods.co.uk](http://www.oakhousefoods.co.uk)

Tel: 0333 370 6700

### **COOK**

Website: [www.cookfood.net/info/Shopping-Online/Home-Delivery/](http://www.cookfood.net/info/Shopping-Online/Home-Delivery/)

Lots of local farm shops, bakeries and butchers are also offering 'click and collect' or home delivery services so it may be worth investigating your local area as well. Another useful point of contact is the Gloucestershire



Community Help Hub who can help with food provision and also other means of support.

### **Gloucestershire Community Help Hub**

This new hub is a collaboration between all local councils, police and health services. You can register at:

[www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gloucestershirescommunity-help-hub](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gloucestershirescommunity-help-hub)

Another good source of information can be found on Government website - [www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremelyvulnerable](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremelyvulnerable)

It is useful if you have a medical condition that makes you (or someone you care for) extremely vulnerable to Covid-19. You'll be able to ask for help getting deliveries of essential supplies like food. If you're not sure whether your medical condition makes you extremely vulnerable, register anyway. You can register yourself, or on behalf of someone else.

**Age UK Gloucestershire** can also provide support. It is also worth checking with your local Food Banks to see if you are eligible for a Food package.

### **Cheltenham Food Bank**

Website: <https://cheltenham.foodbank.org.uk/contact-us>

Telephone: 01242 570080

### **Gloucester Foodbank**

Website: <https://gloucester.foodbank.org.uk/contact-us>

Telephone: 01452 309683

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

British Dietetic Association: [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

Diabetes UK: [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

British Heart Foundation: [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

British Nutrition Society: [www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well)

**If you are concerned about your nutrition or weight you can seek further advice from your GP who can arrange a referral to a Dietitian.**