

HEALTHY DIET DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The emergence of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has put a spotlight on the important role nutrition plays in supporting the immune system. Coronavirus disease (COVID19) has inflicted a heavy toll on people all over the world.

Maintaining a healthy diet which provides essential nutrients and proper hydration is vital during this period. People who eat nourishing diet tend to be healthier with stronger immune system and lower risk of infection.

To strengthen immune system, adequate diet that consists of the following should be consumed daily.

Carbohydrates: Limit consumption of simple sugars. Overconsumption of simple sugars found in soft drinks, beverages, processed fruit juices, chocolate and pastries is linked to suppressed immunity. Complex carbohydrates food sources such as brown rice, yam, whole grains, legumes, tubers etc is recommended in moderate quantity as they slowly release their carbohydrates into the blood stream.

Protein: Protein is vital to build and repair body tissue and fight viral and bacterial infections. Immune system factors such as antibodies and immune system cells rely on protein for their structures. Too little protein in the diet leads to weakness, fatigue, apathy, and poor immunity. Good sources of protein include lean sources such as skinless chicken, lean beef and turkey, beans, nuts and soya beans.

Fat: Unsaturated fatty acids are healthy for the immune system. Healthy fat that are found in soya bean oil, olive oil and fish rich in omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acid (Mackerel, salmon, sardine) should be consumed instead of saturated fat present in fatty meat, offal, pastries.

Key micro-nutrients that strengthen the immune system include;

Nutrients	Food Sources
Vitamin A	<i>Carrots, Red oil, sweet potatoes, Eggs, fortified cereal, fortified skimmed milk, cod liver oil, vegetables</i>
Vitamin B12	<i>Meat, Poultry ,Eggs, Fish, Dairy products (milk, low fat yoghurt, cheese) fortified cereals</i>
Vitamin C	<i>Citrus fruits(orange, lemon, tangerine), berries, leafy green vegetables, red peppers, tomatoes, sweet potatoes</i>
Vitamin D	<i>Mackerel, Sardine, Vitamin D fortified foods(cereals, soy milk, dairy products) Beef, liver, cheese, egg yolk 10-15 minute exposure to early morning sunlight</i>

Vitamin E	<i>Green leafy vegetable, Nut (Almond, Peanuts),Peanut Butter Vegetable oil (Sunflower oil,, canola oil, Corn oil, Soya bean oil) Avocado, sardine,</i>
DHA(Omega 6,3)	<i>Fish (Salmon, Herring, Mackerel, Tuna) sunflower oil, flaxseeds oil, Walnuts, eggs Cruciferous Vegetables - cabbage, Cauliflower</i>
Zinc	<i>Meat, Legumes, beans, nut & seeds, eggs, whole grains, Dairy products</i>
Iron	<i>Meat, liver, beans, lentils, legumes, Green vegetables</i>
Copper	<i>Cashew nut, Oyster, Lentils</i>
Selenium	<i>Whole grains, sea foods, tuna fish, dairy products, meat, pork</i>

Nutrition always matters and it matters more during COVID-19 crisis. Practice good food safety and personal hygiene. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and not a food borne disease. However, it is good to support food safety by abiding with the five keys to food safety: (Food Safety WHO, 2006)

- Keep clean
- Separate raw and cooked foods
- Cook food thoroughly
- Keep food at safe temperature and
- Use safe water and raw food materials

People with higher quality diet and better nutritional status tend to have better immunity, few complications and less mortality during infections. It is therefore recommended to:

- Eat adequate diet and varieties of food to maintain good nutritional status and strong immune system.

- Proper hydration which includes drinking of 8-10 glasses of water daily and intake of natural fruit juices is necessary.
- Exercise regularly and increase physical activity: be physically active for at least 20-30minute daily e.g. walking, jogging, skipping.
- Stress has a negative effect on the body's immune system therefore, managing stress and adequate sleep of 6-8hours is important for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- Minimize anxiety and fear as these can paralyze the immune system.

For the avoidance of doubt, there is no medicine including antibiotics or diet that can prevent or cure COVID-19 at present but an adequate diet will help support the body's immune system.

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