

## A NOTE ON NUTRITION

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# FAQ on diet and Covid-19

**There has been much talk about nutrition as a defence mechanism to reduce the chances of contracting the Coronavirus. How important is a change in our dietary intake towards fighting the virus?**

Till now, the exact nature of the Coronavirus is unknown. We are practically functioning in the dark regarding the treatment protocol against Covid-19. But it's been proven long ago that a good immune system can save us from any viral or bacterial infections. Even if infected, a strong immune system can help us overcome the pathogen. So, during this pandemic, our utmost effort should be to bolster our immune systems.

To boost immunity, we need to enrich our diet with enough vitamin C (found in abundance in guava, citrus fruits, amlaki, bitter guard, etc); zinc (found in spinach, beef, nuts, milk and milk products); vitamin D3, which the body can make through exposure to sunlight from 10AM to 3PM); and anti-oxidants (found in colourful fruits and vegetables); selenium, magnesium, etc.

**Why is hydration considered so important?**

Hydration is key to regulating the temperature of the body. And it can help lessen existing fever. Staying hydrated also means healthy membranes. When we cough, sneeze or just breathe, membranes in our nose and mouth eliminate any bacteria.

Moisture helps heal the damaged membranes so foreign organisms cannot enter the body. And also, we need to replace our lost body fluids to make the respiratory secretion thin. When we are dehydrated our respiratory secretion thickens and it becomes hard to clean our lungs naturally, which may even lead to pneumonia.

**How should fruits, vegetables and other ingredients be treated before**



**storing/consumption? Is it wise to eat takeaway from restaurants?**

The main challenge for takeaway services are physical distancing, and packaging. Even if a responsible restaurant owner maintains social distancing as per protocol, there is a risk of contamination through the packaging of the foods.

The coronavirus can live for hours to days on various surfaces. Some strains of coronavirus live for only a few minutes, while others live for up to 5 days. So, it is best to disinfect all the sealed packaging with disinfectant spray or wash with detergent thoroughly. But when the packaging is not sealed, then its better to keep it in a place of the house out of reach of the family members for 5 days before storing. And for wet groceries like fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish, the packaging materials should be removed as soon as possible. Coronavirus doesn't seem to spread through exposure to food.

Still, it's recommended to wash fruits and vegetables under running water and soak in lukewarm salted water for 40 minutes before eating. And finally, after storing the groceries, hands must be cleaned with disinfectant solutions.

Current evidence on other coronavirus strains shows that while it appears to be



stable at low and freezing temperatures for a certain period, food hygiene and good food safety practices can prevent their transmission through food.

The amount of time coronavirus survives on food packaging depends on the material it is made from; for example, 5 days on metal; 4 days on wood; 2 to 3 days on plastics like milk containers; 2 to 3 days on stainless steel like walls of refrigerators, pots and pans, sinks, some water bottles; 2 to 8 hours on soda cans, tinfoil, water bottles; up to 5 days on drinking glasses, measuring cups; 5 days on ceramic dishes,

pottery, mugs etc.

**The coronavirus crisis has led people to unprecedented financial hardships. What types of food would you suggest for people to include in their diet at an affordable price?**

At this moment, not only for the economic crisis, even for those who do not want to go to the grocery shops to maintain social isolation guidelines, sprouted Bengal gram is a rich source of vitamin C. If there is crisis of meat and fish, we can prepare khichuri (the mixture of lentils and rice) as a source of first-class proteins. We should depend upon seasonal colourful vegetables as a rich source of vitamins and minerals.

**What should be included in the dietary chart of those who have unfortunately contracted the coronavirus? Should the diet change as they recover?**

A Covid-19 positive patient must include high protein diet to stabilise the immune system. Also, as per World Health Organization (WHO) guideline, a patient needs a minimum intake of 2.5 litres of fluid, and fresh and healthy vitamin rich foods, restrict raw sugar, and include at least 5 servings of vegetables and 4 servings of fruits per day.

Black cumin, ginger, honey, turmeric — these all have anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant properties, so they can be included in the diet as well.

**Lastly, can diet alone help prevent Covid-19?**

No, diet alone cannot fight the coronavirus. Proper and balanced amount of exercise, sound mental health and to maintain all the protocols of hygiene and physical distancing are equally important.

**Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed**