

# Malnutrition and coronavirus (COVID-19)

**This leaflet explains how the coronavirus can affect nutrition, especially in vulnerable groups such as the elderly or those with medical conditions. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your dietitian, GP or healthcare professional.**

## Why is malnutrition important to consider for coronavirus?

Many people who are at risk of getting coronavirus may also be at high risk of malnutrition.

This is a serious condition which can increase your risk of infection and delay recovery. People with an infection are also at higher risk of developing malnutrition and this can delay recovery even more.

Malnutrition is more common in older people and those who are socially isolated. Social distancing and social isolation could impact your access to a wide variety of the foods needed to maintain health and wellbeing, and this could impact how much you eat.

Malnutrition can also increase the risk of frailty which is more common in older people. Frailty can lead to weaker muscles and make you more vulnerable to infections, falls and needing extra care.

Unintentional weight loss due to disease and infection is not advisable, whatever your original weight. Healthy eating in older people may appear different to general healthy eating guidelines. This is because this group is more at risk of malnutrition.

## How do you know if someone is at risk of malnutrition?

Signs of malnutrition include:

- a reduced appetite or disinterest in food
- unintentional weight loss
- clothes and/or jewellery which used to fit well, but are now fitting loosely.

Health and care staff should screen at risk groups using the Malnutrition universal screening tool (MUST) (details at end of leaflet).

If you are unable to weigh someone, healthcare professionals can use the two-part nutrition checklist: The Patient Association checklist Parts A and B (details at end of leaflet).

## What advice can you follow to reduce the risk of malnutrition?

Good nutrition including adequate protein (for example, meat, fish, eggs or beans) is vital to protect your muscles. This includes the muscles used when you breathe.

Adequate hydration (drinking enough fluids) is also vital for your health. If you have an infection, you need to drink more fluids. Adults should aim to drink 6-8 mugs or large glasses a day, but may need to drink more they have a fever. Nourishing drinks such as full fat milk or fruit juice should be considered over water because they provide energy and protein as well as fluid. For more information on nourishing drinks please ask for our leaflet, **Nourishing drinks**.

## Do you need to take any additional vitamins or mineral tablets?

A healthy, well-balanced diet will provide almost all the vitamins, minerals and nutrients you need.

Vitamin D is the exception, because our main source of it is from the sun, not food.

The sun is at its strongest during the spring and summer months so, you should try to spend about 20 minutes outdoors in the sunshine every day. If you are self-isolating or cannot go outside, you should consider taking a vitamin D supplement containing 10 micrograms every day.

## Can you boost your immune system using food?

No, and there are no specific foods or supplements that will prevent people catching coronavirus.

Practicing good hygiene and social distancing are the best ways of avoiding infection.

## Should you be concerned about coronavirus transmission from food?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that coronavirus is transmitted when handling, preparing or eating food.

You should continue to follow general food safety advice:

- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after preparing meals.
- Clean surfaces.
- Separate raw meat/fish from other foods when preparing food.

Family and carers supporting people who need help with eating or drinking should make sure they wash their hands thoroughly and clean surfaces before helping.

## How can we look after the community and local populations?

If you cannot afford food, or are self-isolating due to coronavirus and cannot get food, there are options for you. The Government, local councils and charities have created support groups which offer a range of services. Please see the 'Useful sources of information' section below, and our leaflet, **Ready meal delivery services, food access and food banks**.

If you have a medical condition that makes you high risk to coronavirus, you will be able to ask for help getting deliveries of essential supplies such as food. Register with Government (details below).

Changes have been made by many supermarkets and charities to make sure that the most vulnerable are supported as much as possible. This group includes people who have received a letter from the NHS, a text message from their GP or those who are isolated.

Many supermarkets have created protected times for the elderly to do their food shopping. Please check store websites for details.

Many supermarkets and ready meal delivery services can take orders using a phone and some accept payment on delivery. Most require online registration and payment, so family should do this for a vulnerable person if they cannot do it themselves.

When doing a food shop, prioritise tinned, frozen and dried foods over fresh foods as these will last longer and will mean that food shopping can be done less frequently. Butter, grated cheese, powdered milk, honey, sugar, ground nuts and coconut milk are examples of foods which can be used to increase the energy content of a meal or drink.

Consider using ready meal delivery services such as Wiltshire Farm Foods, Oak House or Parsley Box (details below).

## Useful sources of information

**The Patient Association Checklist**, [w: www.patients-association.org.uk](http://www.patients-association.org.uk) and search 'nutrition checklist'.

Staff version A and B, [w: www.patients-association.org.uk/patients-association-launches-nutrition-checklist](http://www.patients-association.org.uk/patients-association-launches-nutrition-checklist)

**BAPEN MUST calculator**, [w: www.bapen.org.uk/screening-and-must/must-calculator](http://www.bapen.org.uk/screening-and-must/must-calculator)

### British Dietetic Association (BDA)

Malnutrition food fact sheet, [w: www.bda.uk.com/resource/malnutrition.html](http://www.bda.uk.com/resource/malnutrition.html)

Coronavirus advice for the General Public, [w: www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com) and search for 'covid-19'.

**Government support.** Register for support if you have a medical condition that makes you extremely vulnerable to coronavirus, [w: www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable)

### Local councils

These websites will be updated regularly to reflect the changes in services available.

Southwark council, [w: www.southwark.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/public-health/for-the-public/coronavirus/food-access](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/public-health/for-the-public/coronavirus/food-access)

Lambeth Council, [w: www.lambeth.gov.uk/elections-and-council/about-lambeth/lambeth-coronavirus-information/coronavirus-covid-19-support](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/elections-and-council/about-lambeth/lambeth-coronavirus-information/coronavirus-covid-19-support)

Greenwich Council, [w: www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/](http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/)

Lewisham Council, [w: www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/coronavirus-covid-19)

Bromley Council, [w: www.bromley.gov.uk/covid-19](http://www.bromley.gov.uk/covid-19)

Bexley Council, [w: www.bexley.gov.uk/](http://www.bexley.gov.uk/)

## Food suppliers

Wiltshire Farm Foods, **w:** [www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com/extremely-vulnerable](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com/extremely-vulnerable)

Oak House, **w:** [www.oakhousefoods.co.uk](http://www.oakhousefoods.co.uk)

Parsley Box, **w:** [www.parsleybox.com/](http://www.parsleybox.com/)

This leaflet has been adapted with kind permission from the BDA's Coronavirus - Advice for the general public.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the nutrition and dietetics department on **t:** 020 7188 2010 or **t:** 020 7188 4128, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. If we cannot take your call, please leave a message and we will call you back.

Coronavirus advice line on **t:** 020 7188 4128

Coronavirus FAQs, **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk) and search 'coronavirus'.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111      **w:** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

## NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

**t:** 0800 731 0319      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)      **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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A list of sources is available on request