

7 tips for a healthy diet during the COVID-19 pandemic

The 'Grows, Gos and Nos' — advice from World Food Programme nutritionists on the dos and don'ts of eating under quarantine.

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The new coronavirus outbreak has transformed how we live, work and keep ourselves entertained. More and more people around the world are being forced to stay at home and minimize social interaction as countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Food Programme (WFP)'s nutrition experts say healthy diets should be part of everyone's response to this crisis. Here is their advice — on how to do the best you can to sustain your diet, no matter where you are and what is available in your market. First things first:

1. Hydrate, hydrate

The body is made of about 75 percent water. The usual recommendation is eight glasses per day of fluid. As we are less active during lockdowns and may not feel as thirsty, it is important to set regular reminders to ensure we are hydrating our bodies.

For flavour and additional nutrients, add slices of cucumber, lemon or orange to the humble glass of water. Avoid sweetened beverages such as soft drinks and soda because of high sugar content.

2. GO foods

These foods are essential for energy which is crucial for thinking, working and fending off disease — think staples such as rice, pasta, bread and root crops. Choose things like wholegrain bread and mixed-grain rice which release energy more slowly, fuelling you for longer and helping you maintain your weight.



A handful of wheat in Kyrgyzstan. Photo: WFP

3. GROW foods

These help physical growth, especially for children. GROW foods rebuild your body when you are unwell or have an infection. They are often required in small amounts but it is essential that they are consumed daily.

These include meat, fish, eggs, milk and other dairy products such as cheese and yoghurt. It's worth buying UHT milk and other dairy products which have a long shelf life, and freezing meat and fish.

Depending on the expiry date, eggs can be kept in the fridge for up to three weeks from the time of purchase. Eggs are a good source of low-fat protein and a range of vitamins.

Limit the consumption of canned meat because it is usually high in salt and fat. Canned tuna is a healthier alternative. Plant-based sources of proteins such as lentils and beans have a long shelf-life and are rich in vitamins and minerals. Rinse dry foods thoroughly before cooking.



*Colourful fruit and veg is the way to go.
Photo: WFP*

4. GLOW foods

These make sure the body works well, help to protect it from diseases and fight off illness. All foods have some vitamins and minerals but colourful fruits and vegetables are generally rich in vitamins and antioxidants. Build a colourful plate with:

Green fruits and vegetables: broccoli, spinach, cabbage, lettuce, Brussels sprouts, green beans, cucumbers, zucchini, peas, green pepper, green apples, kiwi, green grapes, lime and avocado.

Orange and yellow fruits and vegetables: carrots, pumpkin, sweet corn, sweet potato, yellow pepper, yellow tomatoes, yellow apples, apricots, oranges, grapefruit, peaches, mangoes, papaya, pears and pineapple.

Red fruits and vegetables: tomatoes, radishes, red cabbage, beets, red grapes, strawberries, watermelon, cherries, raspberries, pomegranates, cranberries and red apples.

Blue and purple fruits and vegetables: eggplant, purple cabbage, purple potatoes, blackberries, blueberries, purple grapes, plums, raisins and figs.

Preserved fruits and vegetables: whether canned, frozen, dried or fermented/pickled, these are a great alternative source when fresh fruits and vegetables are difficult to find due to seasonality or if they cannot be bought daily.

5. Fortified foods and supplements

Depending on your situation, fortified foods and supplements may be required or combined with meals to supply required nutrients, especially in contexts where diets are of poor quality and limited quantity due to food insecurity.

6. Exercise

Don't forget to also squeeze in some physical activity. The World Health Organization recommends 30 minutes of physical activity a day for adults and one hour a day for children. If allowed, go outside for a walk or a run, while keeping a safe distance from others. If you cannot leave the house, find an exercise video online, dance to music, do some yoga, or walk up and down the stairs.

7. NO foods — what to avoid

Foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt (heavily processed foods) are not considered part of a



A girl in Madagascar. Photo: WFP



healthy diet. It's particularly important at this moment to avoid these foods, as they do not provide any nutritional benefit.

WFP Nutrition

Good nutrition is about more than filling people's stomachs. Providing food assistance in an emergency can save lives but so too can **the right nutrition at the right time**.

As the leading organization providing food assistance to the world's most vulnerable people, the World Food Programme (WFP) prioritizes nutrition as a core element of its work.

One in three people on the planet is affected by some form of malnutrition. Undernutrition – inadequate energy or nutrients – continues to affect more than 150 million children worldwide.

Malnutrition at its most extreme can be a matter of life and death and, in the long term, can hold back people and countries, undermining economies and development.

Our work

Where malnutrition threatens the world's most vulnerable people, WFP is at the forefront to prevent it, and treat it when it does occur.

While addressing undernutrition in emergencies has long been our *raison-d'être*, our focus over the past few years has broadened to encompass all forms of malnutrition, including vitamin and mineral deficiencies – also known as 'hidden hunger' – and overweight and obesity. We have done so in recognition of the fact that, while seemingly unrelated, these problems stem from the same root causes: poverty, inequality and poor diet.

Our approach is integrated, with programmes designed to treat and prevent the direct causes of malnutrition, like inadequate diet, complementing programmes that address the underlying factors, such as poor knowledge of feeding practices or lack of clean water. We concentrate our efforts on the most vulnerable, targeting young children, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and people living with HIV and TB.

We work to improve the availability of and access to nutritious foods, and analyze and address the barriers that people face in consuming healthy diets, such as through our [Fill the Nutrient Gap](#) situation analysis tool. We help build the capacity of countries to find long-term solutions and contribute to policy dialogue on food and nutrition security.



With today's complex and unprecedented challenges, no one organization can end malnutrition alone. WFP is committed to playing an integral role in inter-organizational initiatives and platforms such as the Committee on World Food Security, the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, and in government-led partnerships with UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, civil society, businesses and academia, as well as with local farmers, producers, retailers and communities. WFP also plays a leading role in bringing private sector partners into the fight against malnutrition as co-convenor of the SUN Business Network.