

Eating well after Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This leaflet is designed to help you eat well after you have had COVID-19.

Symptoms can affect your appetite, which can make it difficult for you to meet your nutritional needs.



The importance of eating well

Making sure you eat well can help with your recovery and to regain strength. If you have a poor appetite and are struggling to eat and drink enough, increasing your calories and protein is more important than healthy eating.

Losing weight without meaning to can be a sign of malnutrition even if you are overweight. In addition, if you are over the age of 65 or have a long-term health condition and have had symptoms of COVID-19, you may be at increased risk of malnutrition.

Being overweight or underweight is not good for your health. If you are overweight it is better to focus on recovering first and look to lose weight when you are better.

If you can, keep an eye on your weight to check that you are not losing weight while you are recovering. If you are not able to weigh yourself, keep an eye on other signs that indicate weight loss such as jewellery and clothes becoming looser.

If you are losing weight without trying to, the information in this leaflet can help you to increase your intake. However, if you continue to lose weight or struggle to eat, even if you are overweight, speak to a healthcare professional for further advice.

A healthy balanced diet

Your body needs a range of nutrients for a balanced diet. Having a good intake of nutrients will help you to recover, including regaining weight and muscle strength lost while you were ill.

The Eatwell Guide – on the next page – shows what makes up a healthy balanced diet.

Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy (kcal/kJ)	13%	Fat	3.0g	Sugar	1.3g	Salt	0.9g
		LOW	LOW	LOW	MED	MED	MED
		4%	7%	38%	15%		

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars

6-8 a day

Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.

Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day

Fruit and vegetables

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat

Dairy and alternatives

Choose lower fat and lower sugar options

Oil & spreads

Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts

Eat less often and in small amounts

Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

Try to have a varied diet to get as wide a range of nutrients as possible.

Fruit and vegetables give us fibre, vitamins and minerals which support our immune system. Aim for at least five portions a day. Fresh, frozen and tinned vegetables and fruit all count.

If you are struggling to eat enough fruit and vegetables consider taking a multivitamin and mineral supplement.

Try and spend some time outdoors every day. Consider taking a vitamin D supplement if you are not able to get out. In the UK a supplement of 10 micrograms of vitamin D a day is recommended.

Carbohydrate foods (starchy foods) give us energy and fibre. Include a starchy food at each meal. Starchy foods include potatoes, bread, pasta, rice, cereals and puddings. Choose wholegrain versions where possible for extra fibre.

Dairy foods give us calcium and other minerals which are important for healthy bones and teeth. They also give us protein. Try to include three portions of dairy a day. Dairy foods include milk, yoghurt, cream, cheese and fromage frais.

Some **non-dairy foods** provide the same important nutrients. These include green leafy vegetables, beans e.g. kidney beans and chickpeas, nuts, seeds, oranges, dried figs and tinned fish with bones e.g. salmon or sardines.

Protein foods are important for our muscles and immune system. Try to eat protein foods two to three times a day. If you are over 65 or have a pre-existing medical condition try to have a portion of a protein food at each meal.

Protein rich foods include meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, beans, lentils, nuts, tofu, peanut and other nut butters, baked beans, vegan cheese, hummus and plant based milks.

Aim to eat at least one portion of oily fish each week such as mackerel, salmon, sardines or pilchards.



High energy foods contain a lot of calories but don't give us many other nutrients. High energy foods are the ones to cut back on if you are trying to lose weight. However it is important that you fully recover before you start to try to lose weight. High energy foods are those that are high in fat, sugar or both. Foods include chips, fried foods, meat pies, full sugar fizzy drinks, sweets, chocolate, biscuits and cakes. If you have diabetes high sugar foods should be limited.

It is also important to **drink enough** to help your recovery. Although you may not feel thirsty, try to drink regularly throughout the day and aim for six to eight drinks daily. Water, low fat milk, fruit juices and sugar free drinks all count towards your fluid intake but alcohol does not. Fruit juice contains a lot of sugar so should be limited to a 250ml glass a day. Check your urine colour as an indication of hydration. Dark urine is a sign of dehydration. Drink enough fluids to keep your urine a pale straw colour.

Poor appetite

If you are unwell, struggling to eat enough or are losing weight or muscle strength you may need to eat more protein and calories to help prevent further weight loss and regain your strength.

If you have a small appetite you may find it easier to eat little and often. You may find small meals with snacks in between easier. Try having five to six small meals and snacks every day with a snack or milky drink before bed.

If you have a very poor appetite, try to eat something at each meal and snack time, even if it is only a few mouthfuls. Try to gradually increase the amount you eat every day.

Tips for eating more:

- If possible get some fresh air before meals to stimulate your appetite.
- Arrange to eat regularly with a friend or family member using video calls if you live alone.
- Eat slowly, chew your food well and relax after you have eaten.
- If you usually have low fat versions of foods such as yoghurts, butter, margarine, cream, desserts or ready meals you may like to have the full fat versions for a while as these contain more calories.
- Milk is a good source of protein. It is a good idea to aim to have a pint a day. Full fat milk gives the most calories although all types of milk have the same protein.
- Try having a pudding once or twice a day. If you are too full at mealtimes have in between your meals as a snack.
- Meals don't have to be hot. A sandwich with a protein filling is fine.
- Eat whenever you feel hungry or when your appetite is best. Keep a few snacks handy to eat when you feel like it.
- Eat more of the foods you enjoy.
- If you are finding it difficult to prepare food, you could try the wide range of convenience meals available. These can save you time and energy.
- Be organised and cook in bulk, keep enough for the next day and freeze the rest in individual portions (in freezer bags or plastic containers). Remember to label and date them.
- You may wish to add extras to your food and drinks to increase their nutrition. See the section on food fortification for more information.
- Include convenience foods such as tinned, dried or frozen foods in your weekly shop as these will last longer.
- Some products e.g. yoghurts, ice cream, plant based milks, bread, pasta and cereals have extra protein added to their ingredients – look out for the words 'high protein' on the label.
- Ask family, friends or your carer for help with shopping or ordering food for home delivery if you struggle to shop for yourself.
- If you are struggling to shop, cook and prepare meals you could look into delivered meals in your area e.g. Meals on Wheels, Wiltshire Farm Foods or Oakhouse foods. For further information ask your GP, healthcare professional, social services representative or look at the companies' websites.
- If you are struggling, ask to be assessed for a package of care (contact your local social services department).

Breakfast ideas

- Make cereal with fortified full fat milk, cream, evaporated or condensed milk.
- Add nuts, dried fruit, cream, yoghurt, honey or sugar to porridge and breakfast cereals.
- Try pancakes, toast, brioche, crumpets, muffins or croissants with butter, jam, marmalade, chocolate spread or cream cheese.
- For a hot breakfast try a bacon, sausage or egg sandwich or roll.

Quick and easy meal ideas

- Jacket potato with tuna, cheese, baked beans, coronation chicken or chilli.
- Baked beans, cheese, egg or spaghetti rings on buttered toast.
- Quiche or cheese omelette with bread and butter.
- 'Cream' of or meat/pulse based soup with bread and butter.
- Pasta in sauce with meat, chicken, cheese or fish.
- Pie, burger or pizza with baked beans or vegetables and chips or hash browns.
- Sandwiches spread with plenty of butter and filled with, meat or chicken, pate, egg mayonnaise, tuna mayonnaise, cheese and coleslaw, cheese and onion, cheese and pickle, peanut butter or bacon.

Pudding ideas

Crème caramel, mousse, custard tarts, trifle, rice pudding, sponge puddings, chocolate pudding, yoghurt, egg custard, cheesecake, ice cream, fruit crumble or pie, treacle tart, bread and butter pudding and custard.

Snack ideas

Sweet snacks: Yoghurt, toast and butter with peanut butter, jam, honey or chocolate spread, buttered tea cake, crumpet or English muffin, sponge or fruit cake, scones, flapjacks, malt loaf, muffins, hot cross buns, doughnuts, biscuits, dried fruit, tinned fruit, fruit or sponge with custard, rice or other milk puddings, breakfast cereal, porridge and chocolate.

Savoury snacks: Cheese and crackers/biscuits, toast, muffin or bagel with cream cheese, cheese or pate, sausage rolls, scotch eggs, samosas, nuts, crisps, Bombay mix, soup, bhajis, mini pork pies, spring roll or sesame toast, cheese straws, pretzels and olives.



Drinks

If you have a small appetite you may find that drinking close to or with meals fills you up too much. Having your drinks in between meals may help.

If you are finding it difficult to drink enough, try foods which contain a lot of fluid such as soups, stews, yoghurts, milky puddings, jelly and ice lollies. Milky drinks such as hot chocolate, milky coffee, milk shake or a malted milk drink provide calories and protein as well as fluid. Other ideas for nourishing drinks include fruit juice, smoothies and yoghurt drinks.

You can make your own milkshakes or smoothies to add calories and protein to your diet. Have these in between meals or before bed. Blend the ingredients together in a food processor or hand blender.

You could try the following combinations or make some of your own:

- Full cream milk, banana, ice cream, dried milk powder and honey.
- Full cream milk, coffee /chocolate/strawberry, vanilla ice cream and double cream.
- Full cream milk, strawberry and yoghurt.
- Orange juice/mango juice, banana, mango and yoghurt.
- Orange juice/mango juice, strawberry, raspberry, banana and yoghurt.
- Cows' milk products can be replaced with plant based alternatives.

Store cupboard Ideas

For days when you don't feel like cooking or if you are not able to get to the shops, it can be useful to have some foods in your store cupboard to use in easy meals and snacks. The following are ideas for store cupboard items. Only buy foods that you like and know you will eat.

Milk and milk products

Long life milks, dried milk powder, evaporated milk, condensed milk, long life milky puddings and desserts, dried instant custard, long life cream and cheese in squeezable tubes.

Cereals

Breakfast cereals, instant porridge, breakfast drinks, crackers, breadsticks, biscuits, pasta, rice, dried mashed or tinned potato. Scones, crumpets and muffins can be frozen.

Fruit and vegetables

Tinned, frozen and dried fruit and vegetables e.g. tomatoes, sweetcorn, pears, mandarins, peaches and long life fruit juice.

Meat, fish and protein foods

Tinned fish e.g. tinned sardines, kipper or tuna. Tinned meat e.g. corned beef, ham, meat or chicken in sauce or gravy. Frozen or ambient ready meals. Tinned or carton soups. Eggs, baked beans, tinned beans, lentils and pulses and packets of tofu.

Drinks

Drinking chocolate and malted milk drinks such as Horlicks and Ovaltine. Long life fruit juice and fruit squash enriched with vitamin C.

Other

Rich fruit loaf, tinned sponge puddings, peanut butter, sauces, stock cubes, meat and yeast extract, herbs and spices and sugar.

Freezer ideas

Extra portions of homemade meals, frozen meat, poultry, fish and Quorn, ready meals, chicken and fish products e.g. breaded chicken portions or fish fingers. Frozen potato products e.g. chips, mashed, roast and baked potatoes. Bread, rolls, bagels, tortillas, chapattis and naan bread. Fruit and vegetables, ice cream, frozen yoghurt, frozen desserts.

Food fortification

If you have a small appetite, adding extra protein and calories to your food can increase your nutrition without increasing the amount that you need to eat.

Try adding...	to meals and snacks, such as...
<p>Full cream milk (blue or gold top).</p> <p>Soya, rice, coconut and other plant based milks can be used instead if you don't like cows' milk. Check the milk you use is fortified with calcium.</p>	<p>Milky puddings, instant desserts, custard, hot and cold drinks, breakfast cereals and porridge, mashed potato, creamy sauces e.g. white or cheese sauce, soups, milkshakes or smoothies</p> <p>Milk can be fortified by whisking in two to four tablespoons of dried milk powder to a pint of milk. It doesn't change the taste or texture and can be used whenever you would use unfortified milk.</p>
<p>Full fat, thick and creamy yoghurts. Try to avoid slimming or low calorie versions.</p>	<p>Eat as a snack or pudding, use to top dishes such as breakfast cereals and fruit salad or add to chilli, curries, sauces and dips.</p>
<p>Fats, for example butter, margarine, cooking oils, olive oil, ghee, mayonnaise, salad cream or dressing, lard, suet and cheeses.</p>	<p>Add to or have with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sandwiches, bread and toast • potatoes, salads and vegetables • soups, stews and sauces • crackers and biscuits • baked beans, cheese sauce and scrambled eggs • shepherd's pie, lasagne, macaroni cheese, pizza and other pasta dishes. <p>Use cooking methods that add oil, for example frying. If you roast, brush with oil or use an oil spray.</p>
<p>Pulses, such as beans, lentils, split peas, baked beans, haricot and kidney beans.</p>	<p>Add to soups, casseroles and cottage or shepherd's pie and salads. Try baked beans on toast or with a jacket potato.</p>
<p>Cream – double, single, whipped, clotted and sour) – condensed and evaporated milk.</p>	<p>Use generously in or on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • porridge, weetabix and ready brek • soup • milky puddings, milk jelly and desserts • milkshakes and smoothies • scones, crumpets and tea cakes • dips and sauces • fruit.
<p>Dried skimmed milk powder.</p>	<p>Add to ready made foods, such as milky puddings, custard, soups, porridge and mashed potato.</p>
<p>Sugary foods, for example sugar, honey, jam, sugary drinks and sweets.</p>	<p>Use where possible, for example in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hot drinks like tea, coffee and hot chocolate • cold drinks, such as concentrated squashes and fruit juices • porridge and breakfast cereals. • Puddings and desserts • Bread, toast, crumpets and scones • Jellies and tinned fruit in syrup

Oral nutritional supplements

Oral nutritional supplements are products that are specially made to contain energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. They are designed to help people who are struggling to eat enough to meet their nutritional needs.

If you find that you are not able to increase your intake using the tips in this leaflet, you may wish to try powdered nutritional supplement drinks which are available from most supermarkets and pharmacies. Brands include Complan, Aymes and Meritene Energis.



If you have been discharged recently from hospital and you are struggling to eat enough or if you are underweight or feeling weak, your healthcare professional may feel that you need some additional nutrition. You may also have been discharged from hospital with oral nutritional supplements to take at home. Your GP can prescribe ongoing oral nutritional supplements.

Both over the counter and prescribed oral nutritional supplements should only be taken until you are able to eat enough to meet your nutritional needs and are not usually needed for more than 12 weeks.

Oral nutritional supplements are available in a range of styles and flavours such as milkshakes, fruit juice style, yoghurt style, puddings and soups. Some are ready to drink while others come as powders that need to be mixed with milk or water. Some oral nutritional supplements also come in a smaller size bottle which may be useful if you are breathless, have a very poor appetite or struggle to drink large amounts. If you are prescribed oral nutritional supplements your GP, dietitian or healthcare professional will tell you how many to take each day. This is usually between one and three per day.

Oral nutritional supplements should be taken in addition to your meals and snacks. They are not designed to replace foods, drinks or meals unless you have been advised to do so by your healthcare professional.

Take your oral nutritional supplements whenever you most feel like having them. Some people like to take them with a snack or first thing in the morning or before bed. Other people like to take small amounts every hour during the day.

You can drink most liquid oral nutritional supplements from the bottle using a straw if provided or you can pour into a glass or cup. The drinks can also be frozen as ice lollies, heated gently in a saucepan (not microwaved in the bottle or carton) to have as a hot drink or soup or be included in recipes such as hot chocolate, porridge, custard and rice pudding.

If they are unopened or in powder form, oral nutritional supplements can be stored in a cupboard out of direct sunlight. Once opened or made up they should be stored in the fridge. Check the label to see how long they can be safely refrigerated for. Remember to shake well before opening.

Eating when short of breath

Being short of breath can make eating difficult. The following tips may help you to eat more.

- Try to sit upright when eating.
- Take your time when you are eating and drinking and breathe evenly.
- Try and eat at the times when you are less short of breath.
- Eat small portions of high calorie, high protein foods regularly during the day.
- Choose soft, moist foods that are easier to chew and swallow e.g. fish pie, cottage pie, casseroles, stews, meals with sauces or gravy, soups, milk puddings, ice cream and puddings with custard or sweet sauces.
- Avoid very hot or cold foods if you find that they affect your breathing or make you cough more.
- Some people find using a straw makes them cough more as this may deliver the drink too quickly to the back of your mouth.



Eating with a dry mouth

If you need to use nebulisers or inhalers or are having oxygen therapy you may have a dry mouth. This can make it difficult to chew and swallow your food and can also cause taste changes.

If your mouth is dry the following tips may help with eating and drinking:

- Choose moist dishes such as stews, casseroles or pasta with sauce.
- Choose softer, easy to chew foods such as shepherd's or fish pie rather than pieces of meat or poultry.
- Add sauces to savoury foods such as gravy, white sauce, cheese sauce, mayonnaise and tomato ketchup.
- Add custard, cream or evaporated milk to sweet dishes or serve with jelly or ice cream.
- Nourishing soups can be easier to manage.
- You may wish to follow the food fortification advice to add extra nutrition if you have a poor appetite.
- Try to drink six to eight cups of fluid each day. If you have a poor appetite try to include some nourishing drinks such as milky drinks and juices.
- Try sucking sugar free sweets, chewing sugar free gum or having ice lollies to help increase saliva production.
- Keep your mouth fresh by rinsing with water after using your inhaler.

Additional tips for easier to chew foods:

- Food should be soft and break apart easily with the side of a fork or spoon.
- Food should be able to be squashed with gentle pressure from a fork and not regain its shape.

Good choices for easy to chew carbohydrates include:

- Porridge, Ready Brek, Oats-So-Simple and Weetabix or cornflakes soaked in milk.
- Mashed or boiled potato or the inside of a jacket potato.
- Bread or sandwiches made with a soft filling e.g. egg mayonnaise, tuna mayonnaise, pate or cream cheese. You may find it easier to cut off the crusts.
- Well cooked pasta e.g. macaroni cheese, ravioli, lasagne or spaghetti Bolognese.
- Rice, either with savoury dishes or as a milk pudding.
- Cakes or sponge puddings.
- Softer biscuits such as wafers, soft macarons or jaffa cakes. Or dunk harder biscuits in a hot drink.

Good choices for easy to chew fruits and vegetables include:

- Glasses of fruit juice or smoothies.
- Softer fruits such as bananas, strawberries, raspberries and ripe avocado. Tinned fruits are usually softer and you could also try stewed fruit such as apples, pears or rhubarb.
- You may find it easier to avoid fibrous parts of fruit e.g. the white pith of oranges.
- Steamed or boiled vegetables, cooked until they are tender and soft e.g. swede, broccoli, cauliflower and carrots.
- Tinned tomatoes, creamed sweetcorn and mushy peas are softer.

Good choices for easy to chew protein foods include:

- Meat and poultry cooked until tender. If this is not possible try minced meat or poultry in dishes such as shepherd's pie, pasta dishes with a meat sauce, meat loaf, chicken supreme, corned beef hash, tender casserole or curry, tender roast beef and soft skinless sausages. Tinned meat and poultry are often softer e.g. chicken in white sauce.
- Fish without bones is easier to chew. Fish should be cooked until it falls apart easily. Fish without breaded or batter coatings is easier to chew but fishcakes are usually soft.
- Eggs are a good source of protein and can be served in many ways e.g. poached, fried, scrambled or as an omelette. Try hard boiled eggs mashed with mayonnaise. Scotch eggs may be more difficult to chew.
- Pulses, beans and lentils are good in thick soups and stews. Baked beans are another good option.
- Smooth hummus and taramasalata.
- Tofu, Quorn and textured vegetable protein will be easier to chew if minced or cut into small manageable pieces.

Good choices for easy to chew dairy products include:

- Milk (cows or plant alternative) in drinks, as the base for a sauce or in milk puddings.
- Yoghurt, custard, trifle and fromage frais make good desserts.
- Try adding evaporated or condensed milk to fruit, puddings and sauces.
- Grated cheese can be added to mashed potato, soup, white sauce and cauliflower cheese or used as a topping for the inside of a jacket potato. A chunk of cheese may not be easy to chew.
- Ideas for milky puddings include ice cream, milk puddings (tinned, packet or homemade) e.g. custard, semolina, rice pudding, instant whips and crème caramel.

Good choices for easy to chew ready meals include:

- Cottage or shepherd's pie.
- Fisherman's pie (remove any bones first).
- Corned beef hash.
- Cheese and onion mash.
- Pasta dishes such as lasagne, spaghetti Bolognese and macaroni cheese.
- Cauliflower cheese.
- Casserole or hot pots.

Eating with taste changes

You may have taste and smell changes, which can make eating and drinking less pleasurable.

Try these tips if you are experiencing taste changes:

- Eat foods you enjoy but do try other food that you might not usually eat.
- Experiment with herbs, spices, pepper, pickles and chutneys in dishes.
- Try spicy or sharp foods as these have a stronger taste.



- If you find the taste of hot food off-putting try cold foods instead.
- Try foods that you have previously not enjoyed again, as your taste may carry on changing.
- If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, try using plastic cutlery.
- Keep your mouth fresh by rinsing cleaning your teeth/dentures regularly.

Exercise

Activity, along with a good diet, is an important part of recovery after illness. Exercise does not need to be strenuous. Gentle walking or home based exercises can help. Choose exercise that you enjoy. If you have been given information about exercise to help you recover continue to follow this advice.

Contact us

Phone: 0300 123 0861

Email: kcht.centralisedappointmentteam@nhs.net

Special considerations

If you have a health condition such as diabetes or heart disease, some of the advice in this leaflet may not be suitable for you. Talk to your healthcare professional for more information.

If you are concerned about your weight or continue to eat poorly ask you GP or healthcare professional for a referral to a dietitian, for more detailed assessment and advice.

If you have diabetes the symptoms of COVID-19 may affect your blood glucose control. Diabetes UK has more information about diabetes and COVID-19 at www.diabetes.org.uk

If you take medication for high blood pressure and have lost a lot of weight due this may affect your blood pressure control. Speak to your GP for more advice.

If you are having ongoing problems with chewing or swallowing, frequently cough when eating and drinking or develop a wet or gargly voice, ask your healthcare professional for a referral to a speech and language therapist for a swallow assessment and more advice.

Do you have feedback about our health services?

Phone: 0300 123 1807
8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday
Text: 07899 903499
Email: kentchft.PALS@nhs.net
Web: www.kentcht.nhs.uk/PALS

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust
Unit J, Concept Court
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