

Nutrition Recommendations for COVID-19

Signs & Symptoms

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), individuals infected with COVID-19 may experience a wide range of symptoms from mild symptoms to severe illness.¹ Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus.¹

Symptoms may include, but are not limited to, fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.¹ If you or someone you know is showing signs of trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, **seek emergency medical care immediately.**¹ For more information regarding COVID-19, please visit the CDC website at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Preventative Nutrition

The best way to [protect yourself](#) and others from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated (including booster shots), wear a mask, stay 6 feet away from others, test to prevent spread to others, and wash your hands often.¹ However, you may be asking yourself, can the food I eat play a role in prevention? While diet alone may not be able to prevent infection, focusing on nutrient-rich foods paired with healthy lifestyle behaviors, can help give your body extra protection by supporting a healthy immune system.²

Immune-Supporting Nutrients:

Vitamin A: Vitamin A is an important nutrient involved in immune function and can be found in many fruits and vegetables such as carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, broccoli, spinach, cantaloupe, mango, peppers, and tomatoes.³

Vitamin D: Vitamin D has many roles in the body, including contributing to immune function.⁴ Vitamin D is naturally found in fatty fish (such as salmon, tuna, and mackerel) and in small amounts in some dairy products, egg yolks, and mushrooms.⁴ Vitamin D fortified foods such as cow's milk, plant-based milk alternatives, orange juice, and ready to eat breakfast cereals, provide most of the Vitamin D in American diets.⁴

Zinc: Zinc deficiency has been shown to increase susceptibility to various pathogens.⁵ Incorporating meat, seafood, tofu, nuts, and beans into your diet will ensure adequate intake of this immune-boosting mineral.²

Vitamin C: While Vitamin C will not cure your cold, it may help maintain immunity.^{2,6} Vitamin C-rich foods include citrus fruits (like orange, lemon, and grapefruit), berries, melons, tomatoes, bell peppers, and broccoli.⁶

Probiotics: Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that can promote a healthy gut and immune system.² Probiotics can be found in cultured dairy products like yogurt and fermented products like kimchi.²

Additional Lifestyle Tips:

- Focus on maintaining a well-balanced eating plan. Try incorporating five to seven servings of vegetables and fruits daily to get the immune-supporting vitamins and minerals mentioned above.²
- Find healthy and supportive ways to cope with stress, such as meditation, journaling, and [speaking with a counselor](#).
- Incorporate physical activity. Physical activity can be a great way to help manage stress and support a healthy body.² Try going for a walk or run outside or stay indoors using online exercise and yoga videos.
- Practice good sleep hygiene. Lack of sleep can contribute to a weakened immune system.² Seven to nine hours of sleep is recommended each day for most adults.²

Nutrition Considerations During Illness

When feeling ill, general nutrition recommendations include eating a variety of foods as tolerated and maintaining proper hydration. Certain foods may be easier to tolerate when experiencing flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Fever, vomiting, and diarrhea especially can be a risk factor for dehydration and therefore, individuals experiencing these symptoms should focus on adequate hydration by drinking plenty of fluids.⁷ Healthy individuals need 8 to 10 cups of fluid each day.⁷ Sick individuals may need to drink more to replace fluids lost to fever.⁷ In addition, staying hydrated with water, seltzer and tea can help thin and loosen the mucus that causes congestion, sore throat, and coughing.⁸

Recommended Foods & Sample Menus

The sample 3-day menus below contain foods that may be easier to tolerate when experiencing flu-like symptoms. These menus can be used as a guide for daily meal and snack ideas to meet the general nutritional needs of individuals experiencing illness (for example, flu-like symptoms or COVID-19 symptoms). In addition to food recommendations, these menus also incorporate beverage options to help increase fluid intake. Below you will find regular, vegetarian, and vegan menu options that range from 1600-1800 calories per day.

If you have questions regarding the information provided on this page, please feel free to contact the Dining Services Nutrition Specialists: Dr. Peggy Policastro, RDN and Marina Vineis, MS, RDN at peggyp@dining.rutgers.edu and mvineis@dining.rutgers.edu.

Regular Menu

Regular Sample Menu: Day 1

Breakfast	1 individual pack puffed rice cereal (like rice krispies or rice chex) 1 cup milk or milk alternative 1 ripe banana
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water
Lunch	2 cups chicken and rice soup (or other broth-based chicken soup) 1/2 cup cooked carrots 1 slice of bread 1 packet jelly 1 cup applesauce 1 bottle water
Afternoon Snack	1-2 packets of saltine crackers 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	4 to 6 oz baked, breaded fish or chicken, with salt and a squeeze of lemon 1 packet butter or margarine 1/2 baked potato 1/2 cup green beans, cooked well 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Regular Sample Menu: Day 2

Breakfast	2 eggs, scrambled 1 slice toast 1 packet butter or margarine 1 salt packet 1 cup milk or milk alternative
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water
Lunch	Turkey and cheese sandwich Iceberg lettuce and tomato slices 1 cup mandarin orange slices 1 bottle water
Afternoon Snack	1 bag plain pretzels 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	Stir fry made with: 4-6oz chicken (lightly seasoned) 1 cup rice ½ cup shredded carrots and peas Salt, pepper, soy sauce packets, on the side 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 cup Italian ice 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Regular Sample Menu: Day 3

Breakfast	1 cup hot cereal (like cream of wheat or oatmeal) 1 ripe banana 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 bottle water
Lunch	1 peanut butter and jelly sandwich 1 cup applesauce 1 cup milk or milk alternative
Afternoon Snack	1-2 packets of saltine crackers 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	1 cup cooked pasta 4-6oz grilled chicken breast (lightly seasoned) 1/2 cup green beans, cooked well 1 small dinner roll

	1 packet butter or margarine 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 cup of popcorn 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegetarian Menu

Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo) Sample Menu: Day 1

Breakfast	1 individual pack puffed rice cereal (like rice krispies or rice chex) 1 cup milk or milk alternative 1 ripe banana
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water
Lunch	2 cups vegetarian soup (broth-based like lentil or bean/noodle) 1/2 cup cooked carrots 2-3 packets saltine crackers 1 teaspoon butter or margarine 1 cup applesauce 1 bottle water
Afternoon Snack	1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	1 garden vegetable patty 1 burger bun 1 cup cooked green beans (cooked well) 1 packet butter or margarine 3 packets ketchup 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 slice bread 1 packet butter/margarine and jelly 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo) Sample Menu: Day 2

Breakfast	2 eggs, scrambled 1 slice toast 1 packet butter or margarine 1 salt packet 1 cup milk or milk alternative
Morning Snack	1-2 packets saltine crackers

	1 cup applesauce
Lunch	5-6oz hummus 1 pita 1 cup cooked carrots (cooked well) 1 banana 1 packet peanut butter 1 bottle water
Afternoon Snack	1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	Stir fry made with: 4-6oz tofu or beans (lightly seasoned) 1 cup rice ½ cup shredded carrots and peas Salt, pepper, soy sauce packets, on the side 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 cup Italian ice 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo) Sample Menu: Day 3

Breakfast	1 cup hot cereal (like cream of wheat or oatmeal) 1 ripe banana 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 bottle water
Lunch	1 peanut butter and jelly sandwich 1 cup applesauce 1 cup milk or milk alternative
Afternoon Snack	1 5oz cup Greek yogurt, 1 honey packet 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	1 cup cooked pasta 4-6oz grilled tofu (lightly seasoned) 1 cup green beans, cooked well 1 small dinner roll 1 packet butter or margarine 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 cup popcorn 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegan Menu

Vegan Sample Menu: Day 1

Breakfast	1 individual pack puffed rice cereal (like rice krispies or rice chex) 1 cup alternative milk (like soy milk) 1 ripe banana
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag or 1 bottle water
Lunch	2 cups vegan soup (broth-based like lentil or bean/noodle) 1/2 cup cooked carrots 3 packets saltine crackers 1 cup applesauce 1 bottle water
Afternoon Snack	1 bag plain pretzels 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	1 garden vegetable patty 1 burger bun 1 cup cooked green beans (cooked well) 3 packets ketchup 1 salt packet 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 slice bread 1 packet jelly 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegan Sample Menu: Day 2

Breakfast	4-5oz scrambled tofu 1 slice toast 1 salt packet 2 ketchup packets 1 cup alternative milk (like soy milk)
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Lunch	5-6oz hummus 1 pita 1 cup cooked carrots (cooked well) 1 banana 1 packet peanut butter 1 bottle water

Afternoon Snack	1-2 packets saltine crackers 1 cup applesauce
Evening Meal	Stir fry made with: 4-6oz tofu or beans (lightly seasoned) 1 cup rice ½ cup shredded carrots and peas Salt, pepper, soy sauce packets, on the side 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 cup Italian ice 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

Vegan Sample Menu: Day 3

Breakfast	1 cup hot cereal (like cream of wheat or oatmeal) 1 ripe banana 1 packet salt, vegan butter, jelly 1 cup hot water and decaffeinated tea bag
Morning Snack	2 graham cracker packets 1 bottle water
Lunch	1 peanut butter and jelly sandwich 1 cup applesauce 1 cup alternative milk (like soy milk)
Afternoon Snack	1 bag plain pretzels 1 bottle/cup 100% fruit juice
Evening Meal	1 cup cooked pasta 4-6oz grilled tofu (lightly seasoned) 1 cup green beans, cooked well 1 small dinner roll 1 packet vegan butter 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage
Evening Snack	1 dairy free ice cream sandwich (Tofutti Cutie) 1 bottle water or other caffeine-free beverage

References

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