

Diet and COVID-19

Whilst there is no diet to prevent or cure COVID-19, ensuring good nutrition during this illness will be an important part of your recovery. As registered dietitians, we have put together this information pack to help you optimise your nutrition during your inpatient stay, and also to help you prepare for managing your diet at home.

As a result of the COVID-19 guidance on minimising contact, a dietitian may not be able to visit you on the ward. However, we would like to reassure you that we can arrange for telephone consultations for both inpatients and outpatients, should you need extra support. Simply use the contact information below:

**The dietetic department is open from Monday to Friday
(excluding bank holidays) from 8.30am to 4.30pm**

Chelsea dietitians

020 7808 2814

Sutton dietitians

020 8661 3066



Your nutrition as an inpatient

You may not be able to eat normally whilst you are in hospital. This may be because you are unwell with suspected COVID-19, as well as the result of your cancer and its treatment.

We have included a copy of our *Eating well with cancer* booklet as this has suggestions to help you cope with other side effects of COVID-19, such as taste changes and diarrhoea. However, the information below gives some easy tips you can follow on the ward, particularly if your appetite is poor or you feel full quickly:

Try to eat 'little and often', aim for three small meals and two snacks per day

- Request small portions from your ward host. You can ask for your food to be served on a side plate or in a bowl if this helps.
- Choose high energy dishes from the menu, coded 'E'. Avoid filling up on food that does not provide you with a lot of energy, such as salad and consommé.
- You can order extra snacks to have outside of meal times. Aim to have something mid-morning and mid-afternoon.
- Nourishing drinks such as full fat milk (warm or cold) or hot chocolate are available throughout the day and are delicious when made with our organic whole milk (soya also available).

Eat when your appetite is best and make yourself comfortable

- Your largest meal does not have to be in the evening. If your appetite is good in the morning, then try some porridge or a cooked breakfast, then something lighter for your evening meal such as a sandwich, soup, cheese and biscuits, or even just a dessert.
- Try to sit upright when eating, avoiding reclining.
- Eat food slowly and try to breathe evenly.

Choose food that suits you best

- If you are coughing a lot or feeling fatigued, eating will be difficult and tiring. Therefore choose foods that are soft and easy to eat, such as scrambled egg, pasta dishes, fish with sauce and mashed potato, sponge and custard. We can also provide soft and puree menus if required.
- Make sure you tell your nurse if you have any dietary requirements. We have menus for patients who require kosher, halal and vegan meals. We can also offer gluten-free and allergen-free menus.

Fluids

- Taking enough to drink is very important, particularly if you have a fever or diarrhoea. Fresh bottled water will be provided throughout the day, but it is useful to remember that tea, coffee, milky drinks, soups, yoghurts and custards will all help to keep you hydrated. Aim for 8-10 cups per day.
- Try to avoid very hot or cold foods as these can aggravate coughing.
- If you are struggling with feeling full, then try to avoid drinking too much in the 30 minutes before eating and only sip fluids with meals, to avoid filling up before you have finished your meal.

Nutritional supplement drinks

- If you are taking a prescribed supplement drink at home (such as Fortisip, Ensure Plus, etc), then please notify your nurse. Let them know the name of the product, how often and when you prefer to take it. Please ask your nurse to contact the dietitians if we do not stock the product you use and we can get you an alternative.
- Nutritional supplement drinks may be started on the ward if nursing staff are concerned that you are not able to eat adequately. There are a range of flavours in milkshake, juice and yoghurt style preparations, so discuss your preferences with your nurse. We can arrange for these to be continued through your GP once you are discharged if necessary.

- ‘Nutritional Starter Packs’ – If appropriate on discharge, your team can also prescribe you a trial pack of supplements for you to taste at home. Repeat prescriptions of your preferred product can then be obtained from your GP.

Monitoring your nutrition

- Your weight will be taken each week and you will be asked questions about your intake of food and any symptoms you have been experiencing. You will be automatically referred to the dietitian if there are concerns about your nutritional status.
- If you are concerned about the amount you are eating each day, we would encourage you to keep a food record chart (available from the nurses). Simply fill in what you eat and drink each day. It acts as a good prompt to remind you to eat or drink. You can also add in any symptoms you have that limit your intake of food e.g. shortness of breath, poor appetite.

Your nutrition at home

Going home may be worrying you, as the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to access food, medications and support. However, we know that it is important for patients to keep eating well once they are at home to aid their recovery. The suggestions below will help you prepare for discharge and to assist you once you are at home:

Plan ahead (before discharge)

- Think about family, friends and neighbours who may be able to support you to purchase food and medication once you are home. Enclosed in this pack are some store cupboard ideas which you could discuss with whoever is doing your shopping for you (<https://www.bda.uk.com/uploads/assets/275073a5-06cc-473f-b349ca768124e72f/200406-BDA-OPSG-Store-cupboard-Flier-V2-A4-version.pdf>).
- Some supermarkets are offering a *Volunteer Shopping Card* which is an electronic gift card allowing a friend or helper to shop on your behalf.
- If you are categorised as ‘extremely vulnerable’ by the Government, make sure you register (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>). If you do not have

internet access, this can be done for you by a healthcare professional, family member or friend. Even if you do not need support immediately, it is advisable to register as you will receive a food parcel which will be useful when you first return home.

- You may not meet the ‘extremely vulnerable’ criteria, but you will likely qualify for support with shopping, obtaining medications, transport for appointments and telephone companionship through the NHS Volunteer Responders Scheme (<https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS>). You can self-refer or any healthcare professional can register you, please just ask.
- There are likely to be local services, either through the council or volunteer groups (<https://covidmutualaid.org/>), such as food banks, community stores and home delivery community meals. If you would like to find out what is available in your area, please ask us to investigate.
- If you require a specialist diet at home (such as gluten free), it is important that you continue to follow this. Supermarkets have seen a high demand for specialist products, so we appreciate your concerns about ongoing supplies.
- Vitamin D helps to keep our bones and muscles healthy. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight. When you get home, try to spend some time outdoors, in the garden or on a balcony. However, if you are going to be unable to go outside, consider taking a vitamin D supplement, containing 10 micrograms per day. If you would like advice on other vitamins and minerals, please contact us for advice.

Grocery shopping

- We appreciate that this is a real problem for many of our patients at present.
- At the time of writing, online delivery slots with the major supermarket chains were unavailable. We understand that the Government is giving supermarkets information about the most vulnerable people, in order to prioritise delivery slots: another good reason to register as ‘extremely vulnerable’ if you qualify.

- Some supermarkets are still offering 'click and collect' facilities and this is a good option if you have friends or family who can pick up the groceries for you.
- We have put together a list of the major supermarkets and their special provisions to help you during this time. (Information correct as of 4 May 2020)

Supermarket	Opening hours	Special priority
Aldi aldi.co.uk	8am–10pm Monday to Saturday; Sunday opening as per each store	Stores open 30 mins early for elderly and vulnerable Monday to Saturday. Key workers are prioritised in queues and allowed to browse 30 minutes early on Sundays. Food parcels are available online: aldi.co.uk/food-parcels
ASDA asda.com	8am–10pm Monday to Saturday; Sunday opening as per each store	No specific provision for vulnerable and elderly NHS/social care workers 8–9am Monday, Wednesday and Friday. 9-10am Sunday
Co-op coop.co.uk	7am–8pm Monday to Saturday; Sunday opening as per each store	Elderly, vulnerable and NHS only 8am - 9am Monday to Saturday and 10am - 11am on Sunday
Iceland iceland.co.uk	Check local store for opening hours	The Food Warehouse stores are offering specific times for both elderly and vulnerable customers and NHS staff. Check with local store for details.
Lidl lidl.co.uk	Check local store for opening hours	No specific provision for vulnerable, elderly or NHS workers
Marks & Spencer marksandspencer.com	Check local store for opening hours	First hour of trading for elderly and vulnerable on Monday and Thursday First hour of trading for NHS, health and social care workers on Tuesday and Friday. M&S Food Boxes are available to order online.
Morrisons morrison.com	Check local store for opening hours	No specific provision for vulnerable or elderly, but they do have charity workers assisting the elderly and vulnerable with their shopping. NHS workers only from 7am - 8am Monday to Saturday Essential food boxes are available online: www.morrison.com/food-boxes/boxes
Sainsbury's sainsburys.co.uk	8am–10pm Monday to Saturday; Sunday opening as per each store	Elderly and vulnerable only 8–9am Monday, Wednesday and Friday NHS and social care workers 7.30–8am Monday to Saturday.
Tesco tesco.com	Normal opening hours as per each store.	Elderly and most vulnerable only from 9–10am Monday, Wednesday and Friday NHS staff prioritised first hour of trading Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday
Waitrose waitrose.com	Normal opening hours as per each store.	First hour of trading for elderly, vulnerable and their carers. Priority access to NHS staff and social workers on production of ID

Details above correct at the time of printing but subject to change.

- Online food delivery services that are still accepting home deliveries and new customers:
- **Cook**
www.cookfood.net/info/Shopping-Online/ (click and collect available)
- **Oakhouse Foods**
www.oakhousefoods.co.uk
- **Parsley Box**
www.parsleybox.com
- **Wiltshire Farm Foods**
www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com
- **New Covent Garden Market** – Businesses who usually supply to the market are offering home delivery. See below for the list of businesses participating (London and Home Counties)
www.newcoventgardenmarket.com/blog/home-deliveries-of-fresh-fruit-and-vegetables-from-new-covent-garden-market

Our patients have told us that local bakeries, butchers and green grocers have been making home deliveries in some areas, so you could investigate these options.

Physical activity

Activity is an important part of recovering from illness, alongside good nutrition. Activity will help to strengthen your lungs and muscles, making breathing easier and helping you to feel stronger. Gentle activity, such as walking around the garden or exercises in the home are all helpful. We can refer you to the Physiotherapy team if you require further support. If you have already seen a Physiotherapist, please continue to follow their instructions, as these will be tailored to your needs.

General information

We can provide hard copies of any information you require

- For current, evidence-based information on diet and COVID-19, see the information from the **British Dietetic Association:**
www.bda.uk.com/resource/covid-19-corona-virus-advice-for-the-general-public.html
- Now, more than ever, we want to avoid food waste. The team at **Love Food Hate Waste** have put together indispensable information on keeping your food out of the bin:
www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/why-save-food
- **Excellent guide by Which?**
www.which.co.uk/news/2020/04/how-can-coronavirus-vulnerable-households-get-food-deliveries
- **Age UK COVID-19 advice**
www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/coronavirus
- **Coeliac UK COVID-19 advice**
www.coeliac.org.uk/information-and-support/coeliac-disease-and-coronavirus-covid-19
- **Diabetes UK COVID-19 advice**
www.diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/coronavirus
- **Crohn's and Colitis UK COVID-19 advice**
www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19-advice

We will be updating our information throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Copyright © 2020 The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust
All rights reserved

Published May 2020
Planned review August 2020

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request
from: The Royal Marsden Help Centre
Freephone: 0800 783 7176
Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust
Fulham Road
London SW3 6JJ

www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk

No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any way whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of going to print.

CV-1760-01 Diet and COVID-19