

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Eating well during coronavirus/COVID-19

Introduction

It is extremely important to try and eat well as you continue to recover at home. This can help you build strength, reduce your risk of infection, minimise weight loss and stay well.

You may be feeling very tired and not want to eat much. The Christie 'Eating – help yourself' information booklet offers advice on ways to change your diet at a time when you may be concerned about losing your appetite or losing weight. There are tips and advice to help you eat well during the current coronavirus outbreak which you may find useful following your discharge from hospital.

Please make sure you ask for a copy if you have not been given one already. It is also available on The Christie website. If you are diabetic you can also obtain a copy of 'Eating well with diabetes when you have a poor appetite'.

However, having easy access to food may be more difficult due to the current Government shielding advice. It is very important that you help protect yourself and follow this advice.

So how can you continue to try and eat well at this difficult time?

- If you have lost weight or your appetite is poor, you may find it helpful to enrich your food and drinks using milk and dairy products, and also fats and sugars. **Try adding 4 tablespoons of milk powder to 1 pint of full fat milk to increase the energy and protein content without adding extra volume.** This can then be used throughout the day adding to hot drinks, cereals, porridge, milkshakes, custard and puddings.
- Try to eat small frequent meals and snacks.
- You may find some soft textured foods easier to eat as they require less chewing. You can obtain a copy of the booklet 'Eating a regular, easy to chew diet' for more advice. It is available from your dietitian or on The Christie website.
- Have nourishing drinks such as milky drinks, fruit juices, smoothies made with yogurt or milk, or special powdered drink like Complan (Nutricia), Mertine (Nestle) or Recovery (Boots). You may have been prescribed some supplement drinks already. For more information on the range of nutritional supplement products available please see The Christie information booklet 'Nutritional products – availability of nutritional drinks, powders and puddings'. It is available from your dietitian or on The Christie website.
- Choose meals that you enjoy, are easy to prepare and eat, and are high in energy and protein. Good sources of protein include meat, fish, poultry, milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, beans and soy. Items such as frozen or tinned foods are easily stored and easy to prepare.
- Use ready meals if you don't feel like cooking or buy pre-prepared vegetables, or pre-grated cheese.



- Ask family, friends or neighbours to shop for you and drop supplies off at the door. It can be useful to first draw up a menu plan, planning out your meals for the week. You can then use this to make a shopping list to give to family or friends to help make sure you get all the ingredients you need to cook the meals you plan to. This will also help to ensure they are able to shop as infrequently as possible helping to keep everyone safe.
- Order food online for delivery or choose the click and collect option and have a family member collect and drop off at the door to you.
- Consider using one of the companies which deliver meals directly to your door, for example:
 - Wiltshire Farm Foods www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com or call **0800 077 3100**
 - Oakhouse Foods www.oakhousefoods.co.uk or call **0333 370 6700**
 - Parsley Box www.parsleybox.com or call **0800 612 7225**
 - These can be ordered online or over the telephone.

NHS Volunteer Responders is a new group that will carry out simple, non-medical tasks such as delivering food and medication to support people in England who are self-isolating because of specific health conditions. They will be used to make sure people who are highly vulnerable to coronavirus are able to stay safe and well at home where there is no current local support. If you are currently struggling due to lack of support with shopping you are able to self-refer to this service by calling **0808 196 3646**. Alternatively please contact your healthcare professional who can make a referral for this volunteer service on your behalf.

- If it is not possible to have others shop for you look into protected shopping hours for elderly customers currently available at supermarkets to help you avoid busy times and minimise contact with others.
- To minimise contact with others, you may find it useful to include some more non-perishable food items on your shopping list which you can keep at home for longer ensuring you always have access to nutritious meals. Please see below for some ideas of foods you could include:

Long life milk	Rice/pasta/noodles	Nuts/seeds/crisps/cereal bars/flap jacks/oat bars/granola
Milk powder	Frozen chips	Hot chocolate/Horlicks/Ovaltine (these are available to just add hot water, as they are enriched with milk powder).
Cheese/cream cheese	Tinned meats e.g. ham/ corned beef	Pre-prepared meals/frozen ready meals
Butter	Tinned fish e.g. tuna/salmon/sardines	
Tinned custard/rice pudding	Frozen fish pieces in batter or sauce	
Ice cream	Tins of beans/spaghetti	
Porridge oats	Tins of soup	
Bread – have a sliced loaf of bread in the freezer (this means you don't have to defrost the whole loaf, just take out individual slices when you need them).	Frozen vegetables	
Crackers	Tinned vegetables/pulses e.g. chick peas/kidney beans	
	Tinned tomatoes	
	Tinned/dried/frozen fruit	

Food Standards Agency guidance for consumers on coronavirus and food

The Food Standards Agency is an independent Government department working across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in food, helping to make sure that food is safe and what it says it is.

They have issued guidance for consumers on coronavirus and food.

Visit www.gov.uk for the full guidance.

A summary of some of the main points are:

- It is very unlikely that you can catch coronavirus (COVID-19) from food.
- COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. It is not known to be transmitted by exposure to food or food packaging.
- Everyone should **wash their hands** regularly with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds, to reduce the risk of illness.
- It is especially important to wash hands before handling food or eating.

Shopping:

- When you are buying loose foods such as fruit, vegetables, or bread in a bakery, try and only touch what you are going to buy.
- You should maintain a 2 metre distance between yourself and others, and only buy what you need. This is to avoid crowding and to create adequate spacing between other shoppers and staff.
- If you have been shopping, there should be no need to sanitise the outer packaging of food. This is because food businesses are required to have a system for managing food safety in place, which should include keeping packaging clean. You should still follow good hygiene practice by washing your hands after handling any outer packaging. If you have reason to believe the packaging has been contaminated, you should follow the recommended cleaning guidance. This can be found on the Food Standards Agency website.

Food hygiene at home

- Although it is very unlikely that coronavirus is transmitted through food, cooking thoroughly will kill the virus.
- If you have symptoms associated with coronavirus, or have tested positive for COVID-19, you can minimise direct hand contact with food by using tongs and utensils.
- It is important that anyone handling and preparing food for others follows the Food Standard Agency's guidance on food safety and hygiene.
- You should always use a food-safe disinfectant when cleaning surfaces and follow the instructions on the pack. If there is a shortage of suitable cleaning products, you can use hot, soapy water to clean these surfaces.
- You should follow good hygiene and preparation practices when handling and eating raw fruit, leafy salads and vegetables. This includes washing fresh produce to help to remove any contamination on the surface. Peeling the outer layers or skins of certain fruits and vegetables can also help to remove surface contamination. We would remind you not to wash raw chicken or other meat as this can lead to cross-contamination in your kitchen.

Food storage and reuse at home

'Best before' and 'use-by' dates should be used to make sure your food is safe and that you avoid food waste by not throwing away edible food unnecessarily. You should always follow the manufacturer's instruction on the packaging.

- **'Best before'** is about quality: food is still safe to be eaten after this date but may no longer be at its best.
- **'Use-by'** is about safety: food should not be eaten, cooked or frozen after this date, as it could be unsafe – even if it has been stored correctly and looks and smells fine.

If your food is safe to freeze, it can be frozen right up to and including the 'use-by' date. Freezing acts as a 'pause button' and stops bacterial growth. You can freeze most food items, including raw and cooked meats, fruit and eggs.

When food defrosts, its core temperature rises. This provides the ideal conditions for bacteria to grow if left at room temperature. It is best to defrost food slowly and safely in the fridge. Food should be eaten within 24 hours once defrosted.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding your weight or oral intake please contact your dietitian or GP for advice.

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **patient.information@christie.nhs.uk**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week