

General dietary recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Annex 1 to the Dietary recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statement of the Committee of Human Nutrition Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences

1. Ensure that the energy value of the diet is adjusted to the current level of physical activity

- Eat a variety of foods, as each food product has a different nutritional value. When choosing foods, it is advisable to be guided by the “Healthy eating plate” and to find the right balance between the plant-based and animal-based foods
- The daily diet should contain a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, whole-grain cereal products, legumes, nuts, and seeds and an adequate amount of fish, dairy products, eggs and meat products
- The diet should be based on low-energy foods with low fat and sugar contents
- It is advisable to choose foods with a low glycaemic index¹ (GI<50), which can prolong the feeling of satiety and reduce the energy value of meals while contributing to the normalisation of blood glucose levels and having a positive effect on the regulation of fat metabolism
- If you are a sedentary worker, do not overeat or go on a fasting diet in order to maintain or achieve a normal body weight
- If you are underweight or overweight, do not skip meals, eat regularly, try to regulate your daily rhythm, and ensure adequate length and quality of sleep

2. Vegetables and fruit should make up a half of the food you eat each day

- Eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruit every day, with a predominance of vegetables (3-4 servings of vegetables, and 1-2 servings of fruit)
- Choose raw vegetables and fruit, or minimally processed vegetables (e.g. briefly cooked or steamed) from a variety of colours

3. Maintain adequate hydration of the body

- Drink at least 8-10 glasses of unsweetened beverages every day
- Preferably, drink either water or fruit or herbal infusions
- To improve the flavour of your water, add a piece of fresh, aromatic fruit or some fresh herbs
- Eating fresh fruit and vegetables also helps maintain adequate hydration
- Reduce your intake of caffeine-containing beverages, as too much caffeine intake (e.g. more than 3-4 cups of coffee a day) can promote dehydration and impair the quality of sleep

¹ The glycaemic index is used to describe the body’s response and the increase in blood glucose levels after eating food or a meal containing carbohydrates. For example, natural muesli, milk, natural yoghurt, fruit and vegetable juices, nuts, seeds, vegetables, fresh and dried legume seeds, and most fresh and dried fruit have a low glycaemic index (GI<50).

4. Make reasonable food choices

- Food shopping should be well planned and done according to a pre-prepared list of products that are actually needed
- The food shopping list should include products that have run out or which need to be replenished, with attention being paid to their shelf-life
- It is recommended to buy fresh products and those with a shorter shelf-life, e.g. vegetables, fruit and dairy products
- Where it is necessary to use foods requiring longer storage, the best solution is frozen foods whose nutritional value is very close to that of fresh products
- Freezing can also be a good way to make reasonable use of the food bought or prepared in too large quantities

5. Reducing sugar, salt and fat intake

Sugar

- Choose fresh, frozen or dried fruit without added sugars rather than sweets
- If you do eat sweets, choose those with a lower sugar content and added fruit rather than cream and limit consumption
- Pay attention to the fat content in sweets – read the nutrition information on labels
- Reduce the amount of sugar or honey added to dishes and drinks and substantially reduce or give up the consumption of sweetened beverages

Salt

- Reduce or eliminate adding salt to dishes when cooking and, at the table, remove the saltshaker from the table
- Salt can be successfully replaced with herbs and spices, or alternatively, with low-sodium salt
- Reduce the intake of ready-made cold cuts and meat products. Instead, eat fish and use lean meats prepared by yourself at home, with spices and a reduced amount of salt
- Limit or avoid the use of ready-made sauces (e.g. soy and fish sauces), stocks, soups and instant meals in favour of self-prepared dishes seasoned with little salt
- Choose unsalted nuts and seeds for snacks

Fat

- Choose lean meats and cold cuts and trim excess fat off fatty meats
- Limit traditional frying, or replace it with other cooking techniques that require no addition of fat, or low-fat techniques (e.g. baking or low-fat stewing)
- Reduce your intake of processed, high-fat dairy products, e.g. processed cheese, cream cheeses and spreads
- Remember that vegetable and animal fats have various nutritional values but the same energy value (9 kcal/gram), so, regardless of the type of fat, a high fat intake is conducive to obesity

6. Avoid drinking alcohol

- Alcohol impairs the functioning of the nervous system and reduces the immune system's response to infection
- Isolation and limited social interactions can contribute to abnormal habits associated with alcohol drinking – avoid situations that encourage drinking alcoholic beverages
- Increased alcohol consumption, especially by people who are overweight or obese, or have cardiovascular diseases or diabetes, increases the likelihood of a severe course of COVID-19 infection
- Alcohol consumption increases the symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Alcohol can reduce the efficacy, or increase the effects and toxicity of certain medications
- Do not consume alcoholic beverages during the prevention or treatment of COVID-19 infection

7. Follow the principles of hygiene and safe food handling

- Wash food product packages after bringing them home, if possible
- Thoroughly wash foods intended for raw consumption, particularly vegetables and fruit
- Follow basic rules of hand, kitchen and dish hygiene
- Keep raw and cooked foods separately at safe temperatures, preferably below 5°C
- Thermally process (at above 60°C) foods that require it

8. Consume home-cooked meals in company as a method of stress relief

- Try to prepare meals together with your household members or friends using instant messaging
- Have meals together with your household members or friends using instant messaging, at fixed times, in a calm and relaxed atmosphere
- If you eat home-delivered, ready-made meals, pay attention to proper hygienic conditions during their transport and delivery and observe the “use by” date

9. Ensure regular physical activity

- If possible, try to take a walk every day
- Do physical exercises adapted to the abilities and conditions on a regular basis
- When doing sedentary work, do short relaxing exercises to change your body position

10. Use dietary supplementation if the diet fails to meet the body's requirements

- The use of dietary supplements should be targeted at supplementing the body's deficiencies in the nutrient that is lacking in the diet
- If a routine vitamin D supplementation is recommended, adhere to the regimen
- Using other dietary supplements containing vitamins or minerals, especially those containing selenium, should always be consulted with and supervised by your doctor

- Certain vitamins and minerals, if taken in excess, can have an adverse effect on health (more information to be found in the Position of the Committee of Human Nutrition Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences on dietary supplements)

11. Use reliable sources of nutrition information

- During the pandemic, a lot of unconfirmed or distorted information on the effects of dietary factors on infection with the COVID-19 virus and the severity of its course has emerged, with the World Health Organization (WHO) referring to this problem of media disinformation as an “infodemic”
- When searching for nutrition information, make sure that it is written by expert teams, preferably linked to academic circles, scientific societies or recognised institutions (e.g. WHO) and that it is confirmed by documented references to the results of scientific studies that have been published in renowned scientific journals
- In situations requiring nutritional advice, seek help from a specialist: a dietitian or nutritionist