

Nutrition for Women during Covid-19.

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INTRODUCTION

A balanced diet is the need of the time. Proper nutrition and hydration are crucial for overall wellbeing, fitness and immunity especially in times when the immune system might be called to fight back. Women who eat a well-balanced diet are generally unaffected by changing season, weather, micro-organisms and are less prone to infectious diseases, deficiencies, disorders and chronic illnesses over women who do not eat a balanced diet. Therefore, it's advisable for women to eat a combination of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and pulses to obtain a variety of nutrients like vitamins, minerals, proteins, fats, carbohydrates and fiber. Also keeping oneself hydrated is of utmost importance. While no foods can prevent or cure covid-19, a healthy balanced diet can help to strengthen the immune system and ease the symptoms. Whatever we eat or drink determines our body's ability to prevent or recover from any infection. Therefore, eating a balanced diet becomes very important during this covid-19 pandemic times.

These days everyone is suggested to stay in home-quarantine and work from home to reduce the spread of the virus. This prolonged stay at home and interrupted work and social hours has led to increased boredom and eased schedules. This has resulted in consumption of higher amount of processed food than usual and decreased physical activity. This has come with a greater intake of carbohydrates and fats and lesser intake of vitamins and minerals. In these stressful times, most of the women resort to 'comfort foods' over foods with high nutritional profile. Most of these 'comfort foods' are loaded with saturated fats, salt and sugar. This unhealthy habit can increase the risk of developing obesity which is often complicated by cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, lung disease that have been shown to increase the complications of covid-19.

For fighting any infection, strengthening the immune system and building immunity is of prime importance. Besides balancing the macronutrients; carbohydrates, fats and proteins, women, like men, must pay attention to micronutrients. Vitamins, particularly Vitamin A, vitamin C, Vitamin D, Vitamin E, B complex (Primarily B2, B6, B12 and folic acid) and minerals such as iron, zinc, magnesium, selenium and copper have an important role to play in the proper functioning of the

immune system. Some of these micronutrients such as Vitamins E, C and beta-carotene are anti-oxidants. Antioxidants increase the number of immune T-cells, potentiates natural killer cell activity. Sources of vitamin C include broccoli, bell peppers, citrus fruits, strawberries, mangoes and other fruits and vegetables. The major dietary sources of beta carotene include carrots, green leafy vegetables, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes. Vitamin E is most abundant in nuts, seeds like pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, walnuts, almonds, vegetable oils, broccoli and spinach. Women need higher amount of iron, folate, calcium and vitamin D.

Staying indoors for prolonged durations is also associated with reduced production of vitamin D in body due to less sunlight exposure. Adequate levels of vitamin D reduces the risk of several chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, while also protecting respiratory tract and killing enveloped viruses. As exposure to sunlight has got to its lowest, it is encouraged to get more vitamin D from diet or supplements. It is advisable to soak at least 15 minutes of morning sunlight from 9-11 am and have a diet that includes fish, liver, eggs with yolk, milk, yogurt, mushrooms. Mushrooms can also be kept in sunlight for an hour in the morning, which enhances its vitamin D production eight folds.

Zinc and Iron are other trace elements that are important for immune function. Dietary sources of zinc include whole grains, dairy, meat, poultry, oysters, chickpeas and nuts. Whereas Iron can be found in beans and lentils, tofu, cashews, leafy green vegetables and whole grains.

Checkpoints of nutrition for women during covid-19:

- Eat a variety of home cooked foods. Make sure every meal has a balance between protein (Cottage cheese/Beans/meat/yogurt/ soy etc.), whole grains and vegetables.
- Eat at least two servings of seasonal fruits and two servings of vegetables.
- Choose whole grains over processed and refined grains. Whole wheat, brown rice, rolled oats are some good options.
- Choose fresh fruit or nuts for snacking and avoid processed snacks.

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- Do not overcook fruits and vegetables as it leads to loss of nutrients.
- Drink at least 8-10 glasses of water every day. If it's difficult for you to drink water, try to eat water rich fruits and vegetables like watermelon, cucumber, spinach etc.
- Don't consume too much of caffeine. Limit your intake of tea and coffee to two cups a day and replace the other cups with lemon water or fresh juices or smoothies.
- Avoid saturated and Trans fats. Consume unsaturated fats like olive oil, nuts, sunflower oil, avocado etc.
- Limit your salt intake to 1 tsp. a day.

- Limit your sugar intake. Avoid packed/canned juices and instead have fresh fruit with the fiber.
- Swap regular high sugar processed desserts with banana and peanut butter, oats porridge topped with fruits and nuts etc.
- Avoid alcohol.

In conclusion, eating foods that are good sources of immunosupportive nutrients, meal planning ahead of time, controlling portions, drinking enough water, staying active by indulging in any physical activity for 30 minutes every day and keeping a positive attitude will keep you healthy and safe.