

Food and coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to know

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COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. There has been a lot of misinformation surrounding the relationship between COVID-19 and food. Here we will address some common questions and concerns.

Are there any foods that ‘boost’ our immune system against COVID-19?

There is currently no convincing evidence that any food or dietary pattern can ‘boost’ our immune system and prevent or treat COVID-19.

There are several nutrients (copper, folate, iron, selenium, zinc and vitamins A, B6, B12, C and D) that play an important role in our immune system. It is generally advised to eat a [healthy balanced diet](#) rich in fruits and vegetables, which allows us to get these nutrients through our food. In addition to healthy eating, [being physically active](#), [reducing stress](#) and getting enough [sleep](#) will also help support normal immune functioning.

Good hygiene practice, social distancing, and isolating those who are infected are the best-known ways to prevent infection. For more information on how to protect yourself against COVID-19 see [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) - Basic protective measures against the new coronavirus](#).

For more tips see [how to stay healthy while in isolation due to coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) .

Are there any supplements that ‘boost’ our immune system against COVID-19?

There is currently no evidence nor [EU approved health claims](#) that any supplement can ‘boost’ our immune system and prevent or treat viral infections, like COVID-19. We should keep this in mind when assessing information from people or organisations who claim otherwise.

Making sure we meet our [dietary requirements](#) for many vitamins and minerals is important for good health and normal immune functioning. Eating a healthy balanced diet should provide all the necessary nutrients we need. In case of specific challenges in meeting the dietary requirements, [supplements](#) can be used to add nutrients to our diet.

Can you catch COVID-19 from eating food?

The [European Food Safety Authority have stated](#) that there is currently no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through eating food.

Although it is unlikely that the virus will be transmitted through contaminated food, good [food safety](#)

[practices](#) are always recommended to minimise the risk of foodborne illnesses. When handling or preparing food, make sure to:

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap before and after preparing or eating food
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze and remember to wash your hands after
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating them
- Disinfect surfaces and objects before and after use
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate to avoid harmful microbes from raw foods spreading to ready-to-eat foods
- Use different utensils/chopping boards for raw and cooked foods to prevent cross-contamination
- Make sure to cook and reheat foods to adequate temperatures ($\geq 72^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 2 mins)

Can you catch COVID-19 from touching food packaging?

The main way the COVID-19 virus spreads from person-to-person is through contact with sneeze or cough droplets of an infected person. As the virus can exist on cardboard food packaging for a day, and plastic for several days, there is a remote risk of getting infected from touching a surface or object that has been contaminated by the virus and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. This includes food packaging. However, the risk of contracting COVID-19 from touching contaminated food packaging is very low and this form of infection has not been reported.

In stores, the biggest risk of contamination remains contact with other people and 'high-touch' surfaces such as weighing scales, shopping-cart handles or elevator buttons, although many stores are taking measures to sanitize these surfaces. Therefore, we should still wash our hands both after returning home from the shop and after handling newly purchased food packaging. By following these hygiene measures there is no need to disinfect food packaging themselves.

In general, to try and minimise our risk of infection we should take the following measures when buying and preparing food:

- Always wear a mask when shopping. Masks are a key measure to suppress transmission and save lives. Mask wearing reduces potential exposure risk from an infected person whether they have symptoms or not. They protect the wearer from getting infected, and they also prevent onward transmission when worn by a person who is infected. Wash your hands before putting on or taking off your mask and avoid touching it during use.
- Wash your hands for [20 seconds](#) with soap and water before and after grocery shopping, unpacking foods, collecting takeaways, and after receiving delivered food
- Keep a safe distance (minimum recommended distances vary from 1 to 2 meters) from other people when shopping
- Don't go shopping if you are sick, where possible, order your groceries online or have some family or friends drop them off
- Avoid touching foods unless you are going to buy them

- Try to limit trips to the supermarket by planning meals, shop at odd hours, use self-checkouts as much as possible and pay through electronic or contactless means if you can.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze and remember to wash your hands after
- Avoid touching your, face, nose and mouth before washing your hands

Can COVID-19 spread through drinking water?

The COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking water. Although the virus can remain active in water for a short period of time, water intended for drinking is safe. Tap water goes through several treatment methods such as filtration and disinfection, which would inactivate the COVID-19 virus. Bottled waters are also strongly regulated to ensure they are safe for consumption.

For more information see [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) - Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for COVID-19](#)

Can you still breastfeed if you have COVID-19?

Yes. The World Health Organization has stated that breastfeeding individuals who are infected with COVID-19 would still be recommended to breastfeed, but they should follow these precautions:

- Practice respiratory hygiene and wear a mask while breastfeeding
- Wash hands before and after touching the baby
- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces
- If expressing breastmilk with a manual or electric breast pump, make sure to:
 - Wash your hands before touching the pump or any bottle parts
 - Follow recommendations for the proper cleaning/sterilisation of the pump after each use.

For more information see [WHO - Q&A on COVID-19, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding](#).

Other useful sources:

For more general information on COVID-19:

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) - Q&A on coronaviruses \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\) – Q&A on COVID-19](#)

For more information on COVID-19 and nutrition:

- [British Dietetics Association - COVID-19 / Coronavirus - Advice for the General Public](#)
- [WHO European Region - Food and nutrition tips during self-quarantine](#)

- [NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition and Health – COVID19: Nutrition Resources](#)

For more information on COVID-19 and risk of transmission via food:

- [European Commission - COVID-19 and food safety Questions and Answers](#)

For more information on the impact of COVID-19 on the food and agricultural industry:

- [FAO - Q&A: COVID-19 pandemic – impact on food and agriculture](#)

For more information on the Myths around COVID-19:

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) - Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: Myth busters](#)