



ADVICE ON NUTRITION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT COVID-19

DIETITIANS ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (DAN)

The attention of Dietitians Association of Nigeria has been drawn to a number of claims as regards Nutrition and COVID-19. Dietitian-Nutritionists have also received a number of questions concerning what to eat to prevent corona virus.

For the avoidance of doubt, **there is no medicine including antibiotics or diet that can prevent or cure COVID-19 at present but an adequate diet will help support the body's immune system.**

Note that the Dietitians Association of Nigeria and relevant regulatory agencies have not approved any single supplement or combinations to prevent, treat or cure COVID-19. **There is no evidence that any supplement or health product will protect the body against the Coronavirus. Nigerians are hence advised to be wary of unregulated supplement claims.**

Nutrition, immunity and COVID -19

The Immune system depends on both macro and micro (different) nutrients for proper functioning and as such many nutrients are involved in the proper functioning of the immune system. These nutrients cannot be sourced from a single food rather by consuming a variety of healthy foods. A healthy diet will therefore strengthen the immune system and enable it play its role of defending the body against diseases and fighting infections.

Examples of these nutrients include; proteins, vitamins A, B₆, B₁₂, C and D, copper, folate, iron, selenium and zinc, omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids, etc.

To obtain these nutrients, food selection should be done from different food groups; these include:

1. **Cereals and Grains:** The foods in this group include rice, wheat, bread, pasta, hungry rice (acha), sorghum and others.
2. **Roots, Tubers and Plantain:** Examples of foods in this groups include yam, cassava, garri, fufu, plantain, alibo and others
3. **Legumes and Nuts:** Examples of foods include beans, bambaranut, (okpa), African yam bean (Azam or Ijiriji or Ozaki), soybeans, walnut, cashew nut, groundnut and others.
4. **Meat, poultry and fish:** Examples include beef, chicken, egg, fish and meat.
5. **Milk and milk products:** These include milk, yoghurt, cheese, fura, and other milk products.
6. **Fruits:** Examples include banana, avocado pear, mango, watermelon, pawpaw, orange, apple, African star apple (udara or agbalumo), Velvet Tamarind (Icheku, Awin/ Tsamiyar Kurm) and many others common in various states. Fruits should be consumed at least 2 servings daily.
7. **Vegetables:** Examples include all leaves we use in cooking our meals, carrot, garden egg, cucumber, green beans, onions and many others. Vegetables should be consumed at least 3 servings daily for micronutrients (vitamins and minerals).

8. **Water:** Drink clean uncontaminated water at least 3litres a day (about 6 sachets). Do not wait until you are thirsty.

Immune Boosters and Supplement Claims

It should be noted that you cannot “boost” your immune system through diet, and no supplement or natural health product can protect you from getting COVID-19.

Even though some parts of the immune system require vitamins and minerals (Vitamins A, folic acid, B12, C, D, and Zinc) to function normally, higher doses of these vitamins and minerals in form of supplements have not been scientifically proven to make the immune system work better, but rather can be harmful to the health.

Therefore, in order to keep the immune system functioning optimally, you are advised to maintain consumption of an adequate diet with lots of variety. An adequate diet should supply nutrients such as proteins, fiber, vitamins and minerals, etc in the right quality and quantity.

Fruits and vegetables are especially important; selecting a colorful array; e.g, carrots, green leafy vegetables, fresh tomatoes, oranges, will provide you with Vitamin A and C, both of which play important roles in immune function.

Once you are consistent with an adequate diet, and maintain healthy life style (exercise, not smoking, adequate sleep, managing stress etc) you would not need any supplement marketed around corona virus.

Access to Food and Stocking up Food During this Period

During this period, it is important to stock up on non- perishable food items. This will enable you avoid panic buying, prevent unnecessary hike in prices of food items and ensure adequate nutrition. It would also help ensure you do not need to leave your home and hence minimize movement in the peak of the outbreak. Do not make unnecessary purchases to avoid food wastage. Rather, gradually build up on household stores of essential non-perishable items. If you must stock canned and processed foods, do well to check the expiry dates of such items for safety.

Example of items that can be purchased include legumes which should be stored in an air-tight container;

- Cowpea (beans),
- pigeon pea (fio-fio),
- Bambara nut (okpa),
- Melon seed (egusi).
- Other food items include;
- Rice,
- Yam
- Potatoes
- Garri
- Cocoyam,
- Spaghetti
- Cereal gruel - Pap (Akamu/ koko)

- Star Apple (udala/ agbalumo/.
- Velvet Tamarind (Icheku/ Awin/ Tsamiyar Kurm
- Natural cooking spices (ginger, garlic, turmeric, uziza, curry, thyme, salt, etc)
- Dry fish, cray fish, meat and poultry.

Ensure adequate availability of safe drinking water

It is also a good idea to stock up on other household items like toilet paper, detergent, and any other item relevant to your household.

Food Safety and Hygiene

Currently there is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 is transmitted through food handling or food preparation. Therefore, the primary aim of food safety and hygiene at this time and generally is to prevent food poisoning and other food borne illnesses. Poor food handling and inadequate food safety can cause infections especially in young children, older adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune system.

Some of the ways to maintain adequate food safety and hygiene include;

- Wash hand thoroughly with soap and running water.
- Clean surfaces regularly with disinfectant.
- Keep appliances clean.
- wash produce like fresh vegetable and fruits with salt under running water just before eating and cooking.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw meats, vegetables and cooked foods.
- Cook food to safe temperature, keep hot food hot and cold food cold.

Protective Measures against Coronavirus

You are advised to take care of your health and protect others by doing the following;

- Wash your hand regularly and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Sanitize with an alcohol-based hand rub or sanitizer. This would kill viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain social distancing. This means keeping at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. This is to protect you from liquid droplets which may contain virus from coughs or sneezes of people who may have coronavirus disease.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth unnecessarily. The hands pick up viruses from surfaces and once contaminated, can transfer virus to the eye, nose or mouth and make you sick.
- Practice respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. If you have to use tissue, dispose immediately.
- Improve physical activity. As we remain in confinement of our homes, there is need to find space for little indoor exercises appropriate for our age and physiological states, e.g.

aerobics, robe skipping etc. You are also encouraged exercise your mind and emotions for general wellbeing through games like ludo, scrabble, chess etc, reach out to loved ones and engage in heart-warming and cheerful conversations.

Who to Consult For Credible Information

Stay informed and follow advice given by healthcare authorities.

During this time, it is of utmost importance to receive information on Nutrition from trustworthy sources. Registered Dietitian-Nutritionists (RDNs) are the health professionals who can translate the science of nutrition into practical solutions for healthy living and management of diseases. They are committed to providing evidence-based information and individualized dietary advice. They are available to assist you in this trying time.

Copyright @Dietitians Association of Nigeria March, 2020

Contact Details

Website: www.jdan.org.ng

Email: contactDAN@jdan.org.ng

Hotline: +234-9047550769

Facebook: Dietitians Association of Nigeria