

Healthy Foods to Add To Your Grocery List During This Pandemic



By Judy E. Marshel, PhD, RD, CDN

There is no doubt that Coronavirus (COVID-19) is affecting every aspect of our lives. While most of us are homebound, you'll likely be limiting or avoiding trips to the supermarket.

Now more than ever, it is all the more important to make nutrition a priority. Healthy eating is important for keeping your immune system in top condition and preventing it from being compromised.

What Foods to Buy to Make Healthy Eating a Priority

Fruit and Vegetables

It's a good idea to keep both your freezer and pantry loaded up with fruits and veggies. Since fruits and vegetables are picked and frozen at peak ripeness, they retain a comparable vitamin, mineral, and phytochemical content to their fresh counterparts. An added benefit is frozen foods lasts a lot longer.

When shopping for frozen fruit, select those brands that are unsweetened. For vegetables, select frozen unseasoned or low- or no-added-sodium veggies.

Fruit:

- Start your at-home stay with long-lasting fresh fruits as bananas, apples, grapefruit, oranges and clementine's. Citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit and clementine's) are packed with vitamin C, which is crucial for keeping your immune system strong,

If you purchase unripe bananas, they will ripen over the course of several days. That way you can enjoy them as you go or slice and freeze them for snacking on or adding to a smoothie.

Load up on frozen **unsweetened** berries, pineapple, mangoes and peaches. They are rich in fiber and phytonutrients, which play a role in gut and immune health. They are also perfect for making smoothies.

- Dried fruit is fruit that has had almost all of the water content removed through drying methods. The fruit shrinks during this process, leaving a small, energy-dense dried fruit. Dried fruit can be preserved for much longer than fresh fruit and can be a handy snack. They are loaded with vitamins, mineral, fiber and are a rich source of antioxidants

Consider buying raisins, dates, prune, figs or whatever you fancy. Stay away from dried fruits coated in added sugars (such as cranberries).

- Canned and jarred fruit is another good, shelf-stable options. Shop for unsweetened applesauce and pineapple, pears and peaches that are canned in 100 percent juice, without added sugar. .

Vegetables:

- Hardy veggies like Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, and peppers, which, when unwashed and uncut, stay fresh for several days. Carrots (in the refrigerator) and starchy vegetables as potatoes (on the counter) last even longer.
- What about canned veggies? Buy sodium free. If you have to get those with added salt, rinse the vegetables for at least 30 seconds before heating, cooking or eating. Canned pumpkin and canned tomatoes (unsalted) are some top picks.

Protein

Your immune system cells rely on your getting sufficient protein throughout the day. In addition to chicken, shrimp and fish (which all freeze well for long-term use), other good sources include:

- **Canned Beans:** Chickpeas, lentils, black beans and other beans are great options. Look for those brands with no-added-salt .If you can't find them, rinse the beans under running water to remove a good portion of the sodium.
- **Canned fish:** Stock up on canned or vacuum-packed tuna, salmon and sardines. Opt for those brands packed in water. Fish is highly nutritious, and offers a boost of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Chickpea and lentil pasta:** These shelf-stable foods pack more protein and fiber than ordinary noodles or spaghetti. Look for brands that feature one ingredient, such as Barilla Red Lentil Pasta or Bana Penne made from Chickpeas.
- **Hard Cheese.** Some cheeses, like Cheddar, can last more than two weeks. The key is to store them properly. Shredded cheese can last even longer when frozen.
- **Eggs:** Eggs stored on a fridge shelf, rather than the door, can last for about three weeks. Hard boiled eggs (in their shell) stay good for a week. They're a convenient way to get a protein fix and they pair well with fresh or frozen veggies.
- **Milk and Yogurt:** Milk is also a good source of protein, calcium and immune-boosting vitamin D. Unflavored shelf stable varieties are a great choice for emergency situations. If you're choosing plant-based options, only pea- and soy-based versions come close or match the protein content in dairy milk. Choose no-added-sugar versions of these dairy alternatives.

Cultured dairy products as Greek Yogurt are also a good source of protein and has a long shelf life.

Plain yogurt typically contains around 10–15 grams of carbs per cup, which is already present from lactose (milk sugar) Flavored or sweetened yogurts can easily contain more than 30 grams per serving. To choose a healthy yogurt, pick the brands with the least sugar per serving. Aim for those with 10-15 grams per cup. Or choose the unflavored yogurt, and sweeten it yourself with fresh fruit.

- **Nut butters.** These are a great source of protein and healthy fats, and pair well with lots of foods, from crackers and breads to apples and bananas. If you are allergic to peanut or tree nuts, Sun butter, which is made from sunflower seeds, is a good choice,

Grains and grain alternatives

Grains and grain alternatives, provide fiber and other valuable nutrients. Some items to keep on hand include:

- **Single ingredient grains:** Shop for whole grains, such as steel cut oats, quinoa and brown rice. These make tasty and nutritious side dishes, and they'll keep in your pantry the entire time you're holed up — and beyond.
- **Pasta:** Select the whole grain varieties as whole wheat pasta. Though whole grain pasta options don't contain the fiber and protein that chickpea and lentil versions supply, they're still a worthwhile side dish.
- **Breads/Crackers:** Buy 100 percent whole grain varieties. To make your bread last longer, slice and then freeze.

- **Cereal:** Shop for those varieties that are **whole grain**, fiber-rich and are low in sugar. Aim for products with at least three grams of fiber and less than 6 grams of added sugar (though no added sugar is ideal)
- **Popcorn:** You might be surprised to learn that this whole grain is loaded with antioxidants and fiber. You can buy the kernels and pop them on your stove, or opt for an unbuttered microwavable option.

FATS:

Seeds and Nuts: Select a variety of seeds as pumpkin seeds, hemp seeds and chia seeds, which supply some protein as well as fiber. Healthy nuts include pistachios, pecans, walnuts, peanuts and almonds. It is always best to get those that are unsalted.

Water

Remember, in addition to stocking up on foods it's important to stay hydrated. The general rule of thumb is to store at least one gallon of water per person per day and have a three-day supply handy. However, if you typically drink tap water or have some sort of filter it is one less thing to be concerned about.

Limit Purchases of Tempting Foods

Chips, sodas, cookies, and ice cream are not only high in empty calories but they run up your grocery bill.

Exercise

Remember to exercise .Not only will it keep your body functioning well, but is also supports infection-fighting cells. Some activities you can do is jump rope, exercise to music or workout videos on the internet, or take a walk. Remember to keep some distance between yourself and others, at least 6 feet, when you are walking in your community.

During these challenging times, healthy eating doesn't have to fall by the wayside. Eating nutritious foods, daily physical activity and getting adequate sleep can do wonders for your mindset, your immune function and your general well-being.

Stay safe.