

Nutritional advice during the Corona pandemic - How you and your family can adjust well to this situation

Have you noticed any of the ‘before and after’ videos flooding the internet lately? After a couple of weeks of being confined to their homes people in these videos have considerably put on weight.

But – this does not have to happen.

The nutrition rules of the German Nutrition Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ernährung/ DGE) offer simple advice for a balanced diet, which can easily be implemented.

A brief summary of these is offered by the “Bundeszentrum für Ernährung” (BZfE) whose basic advice is this:

Copious amounts of fluids and plant-based food

Moderate amounts of animal products like meat, fish, milk, and eggs

Small amounts of products rich in fat and sugar

Although we are far from ‘business as usual’ in our everyday lives and even though many -- people have a strong desire for ‘comfort food’ it does make sense not to lose sight of the health aspects of what we are eating and drinking. This is particularly important, if children share the table. Older people, as well, ought to practice a balanced diet.

Enjoy a variety of foods

“Exploit the variety of foods and indulge in their diversity. Preferably plant-based foods.” (DGE).

Our advice: Prepare a nice meal for yourself right now. If you have children, let them participate.

Here are a few links and recipes from German websites:

- <https://www.inform-rezepte.de/>
- <https://www.fitkid-aktion.de/reze/>
- [https://www.bips-institut.de/fileadmin/bips/downloads/infomaterial/Kochen und Backen mit Kindern 03 04 2020.pdf](https://www.bips-institut.de/fileadmin/bips/downloads/infomaterial/Kochen_und_Backen_mit_Kindern_03_04_2020.pdf)
- The „Kita-Kochbuch“, which soon will be available again in bookstores and online in the Weser-Kurier-Shop.

Vegetables and fruit: „Take 5 per day“:

“Enjoy at least 3 servings of vegetables and 2 servings of fruit each day. Legumes like lentils, chickpeas, and beans belong to this variety as well as (unsalted) nuts. Eating vegetables and fruit will supply you amply with nutrients, fibre, and phytochemicals while contributing to feeling saturated. By eating these you can lower the risk for coronary and other diseases.” (DGE).

Our advice: A lot of vegetables can easily be stored for a couple of days providing a cool and dark atmosphere so that you don’t have to shop them freshly every day. Some of these vegetables are carrots, leek, cabbage turnip and even cabbage varieties like pointed cabbage or cauliflower. Deep frozen unprocessed vegetables are ideal for storing.

Canned or glass jarred vegetables is second choice here because they may contain a lot of added sugar or salt. One can of corn contains almost 15 grams of sugar. There are a few exceptions from the rule, though: For a quick food fix, canned or jarred legumes like kidney beans, chick peas, or lentils are ideal. Canned tomatoes may also be used. Dried legumes like lentils, beans, peas, or chickpeas can also be stored very well.

Fruit is best consumed fresh. Deep frozen berries are also very tasty. Children or persons who do not have a sound immune system, however, must consume these only after cooking these first.

Choose wholemeal

“Wholemeal varieties of bread, pasta, rice, and flour should preferably be used in the kitchen. Wholemeal food makes you feel saturated for longer, and they contain more nutrients. Fibre from wholegrain lowers the risk of diabetes type 2, lipometabolic disorders, colon cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. Along with grain products, potatoes are a good source for carbohydrates. Prepared boiled and salted, in the skin or oven baked, they are a great choice which also contains little calories.” (DGE)

Our recipe for a tasty and quickly baked bread:

„Shook Bread“

5 cup	flour, wholemeal when possible	Pour into big plastic bowl with a tightly closed lid. Add close bowl with lid and shake profusely. Add
1 pack	dry yeast	
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon	iodized salt	and Mix well. Add buttermilk. Close bowl with lid and shake profusely, once again. Allow the dough to rise for appr. 30 minutes. Knead dough shortly if necessary. Line baking tray with baking paper and put dough on it. Bake at 175°C (375 F) for 60 minutes.
2 tablespoons	sugar	
3 tablespoons	raisins	
4 tablespoons	sunflower seeds	
$\frac{1}{2}$ litre		

Children can easily help to prepare this recipe. They can take turns in shaking the bowl after having added each ingredient and contribute to baking this tasty bread. Instead of using sugar the dough may also be savored with bell pepper bits, herbs of Provence, fried onions, or cheese.

Complementing your food choices with animal products

“Consume animal products like milk and dairy products like yoghurt or cheese on a daily basis. Consume fish once or twice a week (totaling not above 200 to 230 grams). If you eat meat the total amount should not surpass 300 grams (persons with low calorie requirements) or 600 grams (people with high calorie requirements e.g. due to physically hard working) per week.” (DGE)

Milk and dairy products supply the human organism with readily available protein, vitamin B2, and calcium. Sea fish supplies you with iodine, fatty fish provides valuable omega-3 fatty acids. Meat contains readily available iron as well as selenium and zinc. However, meat and sausages, in particular, contain a lot of unfavorable ingredients. Consuming a lot of red meat and sausages raises the risk for colon cancer. According to current scientific findings the consumption of white meat (poultry, e.g. chicken) is not related to any kinds of cancer.” (DGE)

Our advice: The recommended amount for the consumption of meat and meat products for kindergardeners and primary school children is 80 to 150 grams per week. This is not much given that one slice of sausage or a cold cut may already weigh 15 grams. Thus, plan for meals containing a small amount of meat only once or twice a week and also consume cold cuts only in small amounts. Prefer high quality meat and abstain from cheap offers from supermarkets.

Use healthy fats

“Prefer using plant-based oils like rapeseed oil and spreadable fat made from it. Avoid hidden fats. Fat is often ‘invisible’ in processed food like sausages, baked goods, sweets, fast food, and ready-to-eat food products.” (DGE)

Cutting down on sugar and salt

„Food products and beverages containing added sugar are not recommended. Avoid those and use sugar sparingly. Cut down on salt and reduce the consumption of salty foods and instead savor your meals creatively with spices.” (DGE)

Our advice: Did you know that one jar of fruit yoghurt weighing 150 gram may contain almost 15 grams of sugar? This is why studying the ingredients and nutritional facts on food containers, as the labelling of contained sugar is mandatory. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that the total intake of energy must not consist of more 5 to 10 % of “free sugars”. This means sugar which is added to products by manufacturers or consumers as well as natural sugar from honey, syrups, fruit juice, or fruit juice concentrate. The recommended amount of sugar per day for children between 4 and 7 years of age is no more than 15 to 40 grams of “free sugars”.

Back to fruit yoghurts – the best method is “doing it yourself” by mixing unflavored yoghurt with fresh fruit. This is fun for even the smallest of children, it tastes better, and it is much healthier.

Drinking water is the best option

“As an adult you should drink about 1,5 liters of water each day. Ideal thirst quenchers are water, unsweetened herbal or fruit teas.” (DGE)

Our advice: Children between the ages of 4 to 7 years require an amount of appr. 1,5 litres of liquids per day. Who is able to tell apart tap water from mineral water? What does water with a slice of cucumber or lemon or with some mint leaves tastes like? In what way can you encourage plain water?

Cautious eating and savouring

“Allow yourself breaks for your meals and take your time enjoying them. Slow and cautious eating promotes pleasure and feeling full.” (DGE)

Our advice: If you are at home and have enough time: When, if not now ...

Watch your weight and stay physically active

“A wholesome diet and physical activity belong together. Not only exercise on a regular basis is important but also an active lifestyle by e.g. walking to places or taking the bike instead of driving.” (DGE)

More information here: <https://blogs.uni-bremen.de/healthpromotion/category/koerperliche-aktivitaet/>

What to consider at this time as an elderly person

When you are 60 years or above you ought to protect yourself as best as you can from the new Corona virus. Beyond all other measures which have been implemented during the last couple of weeks, you ought to boost your immune system by a balanced diet, sufficient sleep, and physical outdoor activity.

Plant based and animal food products complement each other

By eating a lot of fresh vegetables and fruit, small servings of high quality meat, daily intake of milk and dairy products like yoghurt, cheese, or curd, eating one or two organic eggs per week, and one serving of sea fish you can ward off infections. Animal products contain high quality protein, valuable vitamins like e.g. vitamin D and vitamin B₁₂ as well as calcium, iron, zinc, and selenium, which are all beneficial for bones and a stable immune system.

Good for your vitamin D level

Vitamin D occurs in only a few foods like fatty sea fish. However, now in spring, daily stays outside at daylight for 15 to 20 minutes are sufficient to boost the development of vitamin D via the skin. Make sure your arms and lower legs are exposed to sunlight. The natural production of vitamin D goes down after the age of 65 years. If older people, at that, do not spend time in fresh air the production of vitamin D will even go lower. This often happens in persons with limited mobility, the chronically ill, and older people in need of care. In these cases, it will have to be addressed with your general practitioner, whether the substitution of vitamin D by medication makes sense.

Good to know during the time of COVID-19: Food supplements like vitamin C or vitamin D as well as other may be a sensitive choice. They cannot, however, specifically prevent COVID-19 related diseases nor do they benefit persons already infected. The first and best way to boost your immune system is and remains a balanced diet. In general, the consumption of food supplements should be supervised by your general practitioner.

Authors:

Wiebke von Atens-Kahlenberg, Certified Ecotrophologist (UAS), EB/DGE

Brigitte Bücking, Certified Pedagogic., EB/VFED

Helga Strube, Counsellor Nutritional Medicine, DGE

References:

- Vollwertig essen und trinken nach den 10 Regeln der DGE. <https://www.dge.de/ernaehrungspraxis/vollwertige-ernaehrung/10-regeln-der-dge/> [Zugriff am 03.04.2020]
- Ernährungspyramide. Eine für alle. <https://www.bzfe.de/inhalt/die-aid-ernaehrungspyramide-640.html> [Zugriff am 03.04.2020]
- Tomaten. Gesund essen. <https://www.bzfe.de/inhalt/gesund-essen-6296.html> [Zugriff am 03.04.2020]
- Empfehlung zur maximalen Zuckerzufuhr in Deutschland. <https://www.dge.de/presse/pm/empfehlung-zur-maximalen-zuckerzufuhr-in-deutschland/> [Zugriff am 03.04.2020]
- Trotz Kontaktverbot können Sie jetzt etwas für Ihren Vitamin-D-Haushalt tun. <https://www.dge.de/presse/pm/trotz-kontaktverbot-koennen-sie-jetzt-etwas-fuer-ihren-vitamin-d-haushalt-tun/> [Zugriff am 06.04.2020]
- Fit im Alter – Gesund essen, besser leben. <https://www.fitimalter-dge.de/startseite/> [Zugriff am 14.04.2020]
- Coronavirus: Nahrungsergänzungsmittel schützen nicht vor Infektion. <https://www.ernaehrungs-umschau.de/news/26-03-2020-nahrungsergaenzungsmittel-schuetzen-nicht-vor-infektion/> [Zugriff am 14.04.2020]