

Dietician tips for #Covid-19 food shopping and preparation

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No take-away foods. No home deliveries. No hot counter meals. No restaurant fare. For now, and the foreseeable future, Covid-19 has us all cooking from home, seven days a week. Lockdown rules and the need for social distancing also mean that we need to do our best to reduce the number of times we are leaving home for essential food shopping. But mindless panic buying and frightened hoarding aren't actually going to help when it comes to ensuring we've got balanced, nutrient-dense foods at home that will help to support our families' immune systems.





Here's some advice from registered dietitians and Adsa (Association for Dietetics in South Africa) spokespeople, Jessica Byrne and Retha Harmse:

First, get organised – Take note of what you already have at home. Many of us will now have time on our hands to make an inventory, tidy up and declutter our storage spaces. Look at the use-by dates of foods in your pantry and freezer and discard anything that is no longer safe to eat or won't be eaten, recycling whatever you can. Make a proper assessment of your food storage spaces, so that you can be sure not to buy more than you can properly and safely store. "Aim to use your fridge and freezer space optimally; for instance, fresh produce such as whole butternuts, potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, garlic and tomatoes should rather be stored in a cool, dry place," Harmse says.

Plan your meals – Keep in mind easy recipes using a variety of simple ingredients; and focus on healthy, nutrient-dense foods. Lockdown is not the best time to get experimental with your family meals, even if you do have more time for cooking. Byrne says: "Rather prioritise the foods you know your family enjoys and will eat so that you can minimise food waste and make the best use of your resources." Plan for opportunities to cook in bulk soon after you shop so that you can freeze for later, especially when it comes to meals that require perishable ingredients.

Make your shopping list – Maybe it's not something you usually do – but a list can really help to keep you on track when you're under the stress of lockdown shopping.

Here are some foods to consider:

- **Grains:** Aim for higher fibre grains such as brown rice, barley, bulgur wheat, oats, whole-wheat pasta, whole-wheat noodles, high fibre crackers, quinoa and couscous. Whole-wheat wraps can be stored in the freezer to extend their shelf-life.
- **Fruit:** Fresh fruit for a week or two – choose fruits that last longer such as apples, pears, unripe bananas and citrus fruits. If you have the freezer space, you can also look for frozen fruits. If you include dried fruits and canned fruits, these should only be eaten in small amounts.
- **Vegetables:** Quite a lot of the fresh vegetables that you buy such as spinach, peppers, brinjals and marrows will have to be consumed or used for home-prepared frozen meals in the first few days after you shop. However, you should also shop for fresh produce that lasts longer, such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, carrots and other root vegetables, whole butternut, gem squash, ginger and garlic. Frozen and canned vegetables can be stored to use once the fresh items have been used up.

- **Dairy and protein sources:** These include canned fish such as salmon, tuna or sardines; canned or dried beans, lentils, chickpeas or split peas; nuts and seeds, including nut butters; eggs; cottage cheese; yoghurt or maas and long-life milk. Store chicken pieces in the freezer, and lean mince which can be turned into bolognaise sauce and then, portioned and frozen.
- **Herbs and spices:** Having a range of herbs and spices on hand provides more variety in your meals and can help boost the flavour of foods without needing to add extra salt.

Harmse adds: "In case you do fall ill, it is worth having a few easy to cook and prepare foods in the house on standby. Frozen soups, microwavable rice and frozen ready meals are easy options that you can keep in stock in reasonable quantities if you don't have the energy to prepare more complex recipes. Just remember that canned foods are high in salt, so be sure to drain and rinse before using to remove the extra salt."

Stocking up well during the nationwide lockdown is all about thinking clearly and planning well as there is no need to panic buy and stockpile foods. "Our president has confirmed that food stores will remain open during the lockdown, and we are seeing this happening all over South Africa," points out Byrne. "We all need to act sensibly and to exercise restraint when it comes to the bulk purchasing of foods at supermarkets, as panic buying places greater strain on the poorest and most vulnerable members of our community."

About Adsa

Adsa, the Association for Dietetics in South Africa, is one of the country's professional organisations for registered dietitians. It is a registered non-profit organisation served by qualified volunteers. The association represents and plays a vital role in developing the dietetic profession so as to contribute towards the goal of achieving optimal nutrition for all South Africans. Through its network of 10 branches, Adsa provides dietitians with the opportunity to meet and network with other professionals in their provinces. Through its comprehensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system, Adsa supports dietitians in meeting their mandatory on-going learning – which is essential to maintain their registration status with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Visit: <http://www.adsa.org.za>

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