

# What to Eat if You Get COVID-19

April 13, 2020 by Kate Schlag, MPH, RD



For the immediate and short-term future, we've all shifted our new normal to quarantine life: staying inside except for necessary travel and exercise, forgoing physical interaction with friends and others, and limiting grocery shopping trips to once every few weeks. But as cases of COVID-19 continue to rise, it's also important to have a contingency plan in place in case you, your partner, a family member, or a housemate gets sick and you can no longer leave your house at all.

The CDC recommends that anyone with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 should stay home except to seek out medical care if you have trouble breathing or show [emergency warning signs](#). The need to self-isolate may be immediate: symptoms could hit at any time, and even if you're

not showing symptoms, you might find out someone with whom you've had close contact has had a positive diagnosis. As a result, you may have just stocked up on fresh foods; but by the same token, you may have been planning on grocery shopping tomorrow. It's imperative that once you have a known or suspected diagnosis, you don't leave your house at all—which is why we recommend preparing for such a situation ahead of time.

You might already have enough food to last you two or more weeks, but we'd like to help you make sure you can eat as healthfully, comfortably, and stress-free as possible during this time period. Here are our top tips for stocking your kitchen in case you get sick.



### **Buy at least two weeks' supply of shelf-stable foods**

You probably already stocked up on some canned foods and frozen meals, but if you've been eating those, make sure your kitchen always has at least

two weeks' worth of shelf-stable and frozen foods. Consider what sorts of foods will sound appealing when you're sick, like chicken soup, smoothies, and toast, and develop a plan to make those foods available in the future. That either means buying packaged or canned versions, or prepping meals or ingredients in advance and freezing them.

### **Consider cooking and freezing a few batches of your favorite comfort foods**

Depending on your symptoms, you might have little energy to whip up a creative and complex recipe (let alone boil water for pasta!). If you'd like to avoid canned or frozen meals, make a few batches of your favorite chicken soup (or any of Zipongo's [Freezer-Friendly Recipes](#)) and freeze them in individual containers so that you only have to pop one in the microwave for a quick and healthy meal. If you're a fan of smoothies, prep some smoothie packs: make individual Ziploc bags of smoothie ingredients (berries, bananas, mango, spinach, kale) and throw them in the freezer. When it's time to eat, combine the bag's ingredients with your liquid of choice and protein powder, if you use it. If you use milk (dairy, almond, soy, or otherwise) in your smoothie, make a batch of milk ice cubes and then transfer them to a plastic bag for later.



For the next few weeks, freeze any vegetable scraps and bones you have leftover from any recipes you make; our [Whole Roasted Lemon-Herb Chicken](#) is a great recipe to start with. When you have enough, make your own vegetable or chicken broth and freeze it for later. Homemade broths and stock recipes are pretty flexible, but a rough blueprint to follow is a few pounds of chicken pieces, one onion, two carrots, and two celery stalks, plus any herbs you have on hand (parsley and basil are great options); combine all ingredients with three quarts of water, bring to a boil, and then simmer for 2-3 hours. After, strain out any solids, let cool, and freeze in smaller batches so you can reheat single serving sizes as needed.

### **Give yourself options**

Aim to buy a variety of options—you don't want to buy 28 packages of ramen only to get sick of them on day two! Cravings can be fickle when you're sick, so arm yourself with options. While you're still healthy, consider stashing away one or two servings of a few different dinners in your freezer; each day, you'll have a few options to choose from depending on your appetite. In addition to

freezing whole reheatable meals, you can also prep components of meals, like tomato sauce or meatballs, that you can pair with shelf-stable staples like pasta and beans.



As a bonus, variety in meals means you're getting a balance of micronutrients each day, which is key for supporting a healthy immune system.

### **Use up fresh foods first**

If you were lucky enough to have gone grocery shopping relatively recently, you might have a fridge stocked with fresh foods. If that's the case, plan your meals around using up the foods that will spoil fastest first: that includes fruits and vegetables like leafy greens, mushrooms, tomatoes, avocados, asparagus, herbs, berries, cherries, and stone fruit; raw chicken or turkey, ground meat, sausages, and raw fish or seafood (1-2 days) and red meat and pork (3-5 days). If you know you won't get to those foods before they go bad, toss them in the freezer immediately so that you have a little wiggle room on the other side when you defrost them, or add them to a meal that you can

freeze. Foods like potatoes, onions, citrus fruit, apples, eggs, pasteurized milk, and unopened, vacuum sealed smoked salmon can last a few weeks in the fridge.

### **Consider grocery or meal delivery options—but take precautions**

As long as you confirm that you'll have zero contact with another human, food delivery is still an option. If you do go this route, take precautions: make sure you select "leave at my door" (write it in the notes if this isn't an option to select) so that your delivery person doesn't have to ring your doorbell. Make sure your delivery person is gone before opening the door to grab your food. When you pick up your food or groceries, avoid touching anything other than your food or bags, and wipe down the doorbell, door handle, and anything else you touched with disinfectant wipes.

Order your groceries online. As you prepare your list, please review our [Immunity Booster recipes](#) or recipes that are ready in [under 30 minutes](#)). Remember that orders right now can be delayed by more than a week, and it can be difficult to nab a delivery spot—so don't count on on-demand delivery.



