

Diet and COVID-19

The whole of the world is passing through difficult times due to the unprecedented spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)-coronavirus (CoV)-2 virus.^[1] We know that there is no known medicine to kill the virus and no vaccine to prevent the disease at present. On the other hand, it is also well documented that populations having good dietary practices may not have severe infection.^[2] As there is no treatment or any vaccine, the best strategy to fight with this virus is to take preventive measures and to carry out some health promotion activities such as yoga and physical activity. The best prevention is done using dietary interventions, which have been tested and promoted by our forefathers. Such knowledge is transferred from one generation to another generation through collective conscious or collective unconscious modes.

The entry points for the SARS-CoV-2 virus are eyes, nose, and mouth.^[3] The virus is usually transmitted by droplets from infected persons during coughing and sneezing. The person who is contracting a virus should protect these organs. Applying oil in the nasal cavities and mouth oil pulling swish help in flushing out the virus as per available literature.

During regular periods, we have grown the habits of eating fast/junk foods with no dietary values. The general feeling of the population is easy to access and availability without going through the rigors of cooking foods at home. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced most of the countries to take drastic steps such as lockdown, isolation, or quarantine of the affected populations. This has led to the restricted availability of such fast/junk foods. People are forced to stay indoors. There is no shortage of time and essential resources to cook food at home. The strategies should be made to use time and food ingredients optimally.

As per traditional knowledge (shared on the website of the Ministry of AYUSH), drinking warm water is helpful in any health challenge. Liberal use of spices such as Haldi (Turmeric), Jeera (Cumin), Dhaniya (Coriander), and Lahsun (Garlic) is considered supportive.^[4] Turmeric acts as an anti-inflammatory agent, just like tumor necrosis factor-blockers.^[5] Specific diets or functional foods such as Chyavanprash are considered as immunity boosters. Drinks such as herbal tea/decoction (Kadha) having Tulsi (Basil), Dalchini (Cinnamon), Kalimirch (Black pepper), Shunthi (Dry Ginger), and Munakka (Raisin) should be taken with jaggery (natural sugar) and/or fresh lemon juice liberally. Hot milk with Haldi (turmeric) powder is also recommended. Some of the diets are used locally in Ayurved such as sesame oil/coconut oil or ghee in both the nostrils (Pratimarsh Nasya) and putting the same oils in mouth and swishing without drinking. Some diets are used without processing for dry cough such as steam inhalation with fresh Pudina (Mint) leaves or Ajwain (Caraway seeds) or Lavang (Clove) powder mixed with natural sugar/honey.

Some diets or dietary components are also recommended by modern systems of medicine.^[6] Steam and lukewarm water should be sipped throughout the day at regular intervals. Vitamins B-12, C, and D; zinc; omega-3 fatty acids; and antioxidants should be taken as per the recommended schedule. Fresh fruits and vegetables, which are rich in fiber, are recommended to be consumed daily. Refined grains such as wheat and rice should be replaced with whole grains foods such as whole grain wheat, cereals or oats, and brown rice.

It may be noted that most young people may have an infection, but due to strong immunity, they may not suffer from the severe infectious condition. However, populations such as older persons, pregnant women, children, and persons with disabilities are more prone to contract such infections. They should take extra precautions as far as diets are concerned. Frequent, small, and multicolored diets are advisable.

In addition to advice on intake, these systems also suggest which foods or items should be avoided. Trans fatty oils, processed meats, and aerated (fizzy, sparkling) drinks should be avoided as much as possible. Alcohol and tobacco cause more harm than any benefit during a challenging situation.^[6]

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Conflicts of interest

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