

# Nutrition

Category: 3. Road to Recovery

## Healthy eating and Long COVID

There is no specific diet that can prevent or cure Long COVID, but following a healthy eating pattern as much as you can, when you can, can have a positive effect on your overall health and can support your recovery journey.

- Healthy eating can help:
- Support your immune system
- Improve your energy levels
- Aid recovery by building and repairing muscles and tissues
- Reduce inflammation and chronic disease risk
- Enhance mood
- Achieve a healthy weight



Healthy eating when living with Long COVID can be challenging for many different reasons, including:

- **Fatigue:** People with Long COVID often experience chronic fatigue, which can make it difficult to find the energy to shop for, prepare, and cook healthy meals.

- **Brain fog:** The cognitive impairment associated with brain fog can affect memory, concentration, and decision making. These symptoms can make it harder for someone to plan meals, follow a balanced diet, and even remember to eat regularly.
- **Loss of appetite or taste changes:** Many people with Long COVID experience changes in their sense of taste or smell or a loss of appetite. These symptoms can make eating less enjoyable and might cause people to avoid certain foods.

However, there are small, doable strategies you can use to follow a healthy eating pattern most of the time.

### **Other impacts related to nutrition**

- **Weight gain or loss:** People with Long COVID may experience unintentional weight loss or unintentional weight gain. Ask a family doctor for a referral to a Registered Dietitian to help you achieve a healthy weight to improve your overall health.
- **Taste and smell changes:** If you are struggling to eat because of taste and smell changes due to Long COVID, please visit Taste and Smell Changes in *MyGuide* for ideas on how to improve the taste of food.
- **Dysphagia:** If you have difficulty swallowing your foods or fluids, please talk to a family doctor and consider a referral to a Registered Speech and Language Pathologist.
- **Mood:** There is some research showing that a [healthy eating pattern can help your mood.](#)
- **New food sensitivities with Long COVID:** Some people develop new food sensitivities with Long COVID. A dietitian can help identify triggers, recommend suitable alternatives, and create a balanced symptom-friendly meal plan.

## A healthy eating pattern includes a variety of foods

We need to eat a variety of foods to nourish our bodies. Here is a list of food groups and examples to help you implement this advice.

- **Fruit, vegetables, and salad:** Think about 'eating a rainbow.' Enjoy lots of different colours of these foods. Fresh, frozen, and canned options all count, and this is important if you do not have the energy to cook or do grocery shopping often. These foods are an excellent source of vitamins, minerals, and fibre and should ideally be included at each mealtime. They also make excellent snacks.
- **Whole grain foods:** Aim for whole grain versions of bread, grains, rice, pasta, quinoa, bannock, and jacket potatoes. Ideally, whole grain foods should be included at each mealtime. These foods are an excellent source of vitamins, minerals, and fibre. By choosing whole grain versions, you will provide your body with a slow and steady release of energy which may be helpful for managing fatigue and preventing crashes.

- **Protein foods:** Variety is important. Try to include one or more items below at each mealtime:
  - Legumes, such as beans, peas, and lentils
  - White fish (such as cod, haddock, halibut, tilapia, sole, bass) and oily fish (such as salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring, trout)
  - Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese, or dairy alternatives that are fortified with calcium, such as fortified soy milk
  - Other animal protein, such as poultry, red meat, and wild game (please note it is best to limit eating red meat to once per week)
  - Tofu
- Protein is excellent for recovery and to keep you feeling full for longer.
- **Foods with healthy fats:** Avocado, olive oil, nuts, seeds, and nut butters contain healthy, unsaturated fats. Include them in small amounts everyday with mealtimes or as snacks.
- **Others:** Try to eat foods that are high in salt, sugar, and fat in smaller amounts and less often.

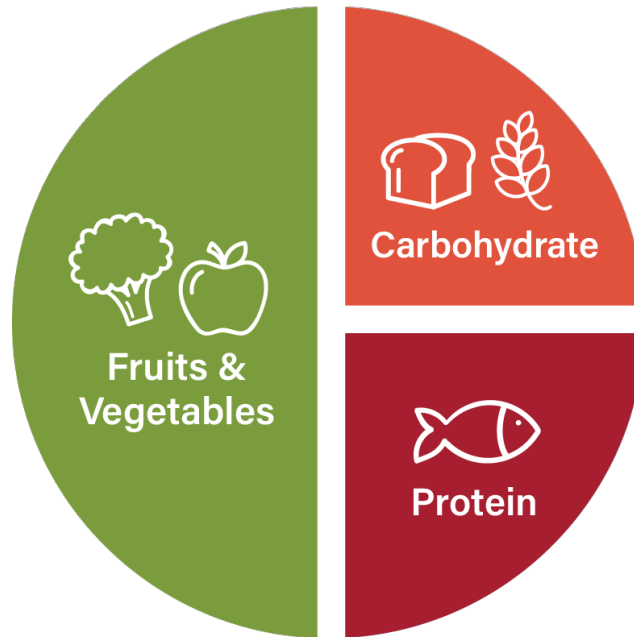
## Portion size for healthy eating

Portion size and balanced meals are key elements of healthy eating. For each mealtime, try to include:

1. **Fruit, vegetables, and salad:** 50% of your plate, 'eat a rainbow'
2. **Whole grain foods:** 25% of your plate, brown is best!
3. **Protein foods:** 25% of your plate, aim for variety

If you can't have these percentages at each meal, try to aim for these percentages for your total food intake for the day.

Here is an example of a healthy plate.



You can also read this [list of healthy meals](#) from the Dietitians of Canada for inspiration.

For more information and recipe ideas, please visit the [Canada's Food Guide website](#) (you can click on 'Food guide snapshot' button then 'Other languages' to find this list in your language), and the [Food Guide for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis](#).

## Fluids

Make water your drink of choice as much as you can, when you can.

Most adults need at least 1.5 to 2 litres of water everyday. Talk to a doctor or nurse practitioner for individual fluid targets.

For people with Long COVID, it is important to drink enough water each day to help manage fatigue.

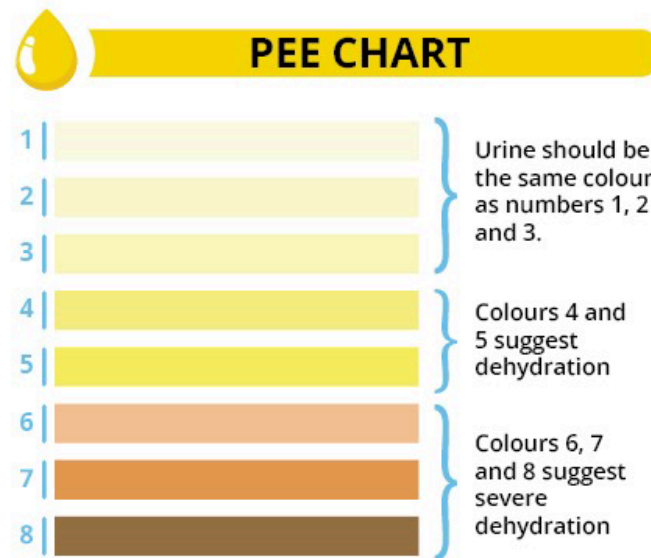
Be mindful of drinking alcohol, caffeine, and sugar sweetened beverages as they can worsen your Long COVID symptoms.

### Checking your urine for your fluid intake

You can monitor your urine to check if you are drinking enough water. Aim for a pale yellow colour.

The 'pee chart' below is a useful guide to understanding the colour of your urine.

- Numbers 1, 2, or 3: You are hydrated.
- Numbers 4 and 5: Suggests dehydration. Try to drink some water.
- Numbers 6, 7, or 8: Suggests severe dehydration. Make sure to drink more water.



*Armstrong Le (2000): Performing in Extreme Environments  
Champaign: Human Kinetics*

## Alternative diets

We advise you to avoid restrictive diets that are not supported by strong scientific research (such as diets that involve fasting or reducing the amount of food you eat, or diets that remove one or more major food groups, such as no carb diet). These diets can be challenging to follow, especially when you are struggling with fatigue, brain fog, and other symptoms of Long COVID. They can also be expensive.

Here are two common diets that have been suggested for Long COVID that should be approached with caution.

- **The ketogenic diet** has been proposed as a diet to prevent Long COVID. A ketogenic diet has side effects including fatigue, dizziness, and 'keto-flu' which may worsen your symptoms of Long COVID. If

you would like to try this diet, please discuss with a doctor first to make sure it is safe for you and seek a referral to a Registered Dietitian to help prevent nutritional deficiencies. Please see this [document](#) for more information about ketogenic diets.

- **The low histamine diet** has been suggested as a potential treatment for the management of Long COVID. However, there is limited evidence to support this claim, and therefore this approach is not currently recommended. If you would like to try this diet, we suggest seeking a referral to a Registered Dietitian. Please see this [document](#) for more information about low histamine diet.

Overall, more research is needed on these and other diets for their potential benefits (and harms) for people with Long COVID.

## Healthy eating while experiencing fatigue

When you are experiencing fatigue, it can feel difficult to plan, buy, and make healthy meals and snacks. It can even feel difficult to sit and eat a whole meal.

Here are some tips to help you navigate this challenge.

### Tips for meals and snacks

- Aim for smaller meals over the course of the day. This can help reduce the energy it takes to eat a larger meal. If you don't feel like eating a meal, enjoy a small snack every 2 to 3 hours. This provides your body with regular nutritious foods that can help maintain your overall energy levels.
- Keep healthy snacks in the cupboard, such as nuts and seeds, wholegrain crackers, and dried fruit. Here is a [list of other healthy snack ideas](#) and how to prepare them.

### Tips for grocery shopping

- Ask a family member or a friend to do your grocery shopping for you. Here is an example of a grocery list you can use on a weekly basis to save your precious energy [Healthy Grocery List](#).
- Choose an online grocery service or a meal delivery program if that is an option for you.

### Tips for planning and preparing your meals

- Plan your meals ahead of time (for the week, for example) when you have the energy. You can use a tool like this [Weekly Menu Planner](#). You are more likely to achieve your healthy eating goals if you plan ahead. An added benefit to planning ahead is that you do not have to think about this during the week and you can use your energy to instead focus on other tasks that are important to you.

- Ask a family member or a friend to do some batch cooking for you. Here is a [recipe book](#) containing lots of simple nutritious meals for inspiration, and [Canada's Food Guide lists 5 ingredients which can make 5 healthy meals](#) for when you have little energy and would like a nutritious meal. You can freeze the rest in small portions that are easy to defrost and warm up.
- Use time saving appliances such as a slow cooker, rice cooker, air fryer, and the microwave. Many of these devices also do not need to be watched during cooking time—you can set a timer and leave them until the food is done.
- Use ready made meals, 'instant' or fast foods, frozen or canned foods. Overall, the goal is to nourish your body with minimal effort. Aim to do what you can, when you can to eat as healthy as possible. Be kind to yourself.

## Gut health and Long COVID

Many people with Long COVID experience challenging gut symptoms such as constipation, diarrhea, bloating, and nausea. Our gut health is significantly influenced by activity levels, fiber, and fluid intake, all of which can be impacted by Long COVID. Additionally, stress, anxiety, poor sleep, and side effects from certain medications can further affect gut health.

Some people with Long COVID may also develop [Irritable Bowel Syndrome \(IBS\)](#) or develop symptoms of IBS. IBS is a condition of the intestines that can cause pain, cramping, bloating, diarrhea, or constipation. It is important to talk to a family doctor or nurse practitioner if you think you have IBS, as they can rule out other conditions that may be causing your symptoms such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease or Celiac Disease.

Here are some strategies and tools to help you track and manage your gut symptoms, including when you talk to a medical professional.

- **A food and symptom journal** can be a helpful tool to pinpoint your food and behaviour triggers. A record of your food and symptoms can also help a healthcare provider understand your symptoms. Here is a [sample journal template](#) that you can use or adapt to your needs.
- **The [Bristol stool chart](#)** is a visual tool that helps you describe your bowel movements. Use this when filling out your food and symptom journal and when talking with a healthcare provider.
- [myIBS](#) is a free tracking app for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) built by the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation whose members include gastroenterologists, surgeons, scientists, and nurses. The app allows you to track gut symptoms, bowel movements, food intake, sleep, stress, and more.

You can read more about evidence-based information on diet and IBS [here](#).

## The low FODMAP diet

FODMAPs are a group of carbohydrates that aren't absorbed properly in the gut, which can trigger symptoms in people with IBS.

A low FODMAP diet can help some people with IBS, but it is restrictive, and it can take a lot of energy to follow, which may be challenging with Long COVID. If you would like to try the low FODMAP diet, seek help from a Registered Dietitian. (Please see the [Canadian Digestive Health Foundation website](#) for more information about low FODMAP diet.)

## Nutritional supplements

Following a healthy eating pattern is the first step to getting all the nutrients you need to support your body with Long COVID. We call this a 'food first approach.'

However, we may not get all the nutrients in the right amounts from our food. Nutritional supplements can help fill that gap. Here are some nutrients that may require supplementation.

- **Vitamin D:** Most people will need a vitamin D supplement. The dose depends on your gender and age. Please see [here](#) for detailed information.
- **Folic acid:** Anyone who could become pregnant needs to take a multivitamin with 0.4 mg of folic acid in it every day.
- **Omega 3 fatty acids:** if you do not eat oily fish on a regular basis, talk to a doctor or nurse practitioner about taking a supplement.

Here are some tips and strategies for taking nutritional supplements:

- If you have been feeling unwell and you are unable to follow a healthy eating pattern, you could consider taking a general multivitamin and mineral supplement once daily.
- Make sure to inform your healthcare provider about all the supplements you are taking.
- If you are worried about a nutritional deficiency, ask a doctor or nurse practitioner to blood tests for nutritional deficiencies before starting a nutritional supplement. Talk to them about the correct dose of a nutritional supplement for you.
- Choose a supplement that has a Natural Product Number (NPN). An NPN means the supplement meets Health Canada's safety standards for natural health products.

**Taurine supplementation:** There is currently not enough scientific research to recommend taurine supplementation for adults with Long COVID (please see the Canadian Guideline for Post COVID-19 Condition [recommendation against taking taurine supplements](#)). More research is needed on the benefits and harms of taurine in people with Long COVID.

## Take home messages

- Small changes can make a big difference over time. Do what you can, when you can.
- Eat foods that bring you joy.
- Choose a variety of colourful foods and avoid restrictive eating patterns.
- Delegate grocery shopping and cooking to a family member or friend.
- Be mindful of the gut-brain connection, focus on reducing stress levels and finding peace.
- Setting SMART goals can be helpful when trying to implement a change. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. An example of a SMART goal is: 'I will eat a red apple and 6 almonds every day at 11:00 A.M. I will include these foods on my weekly shopping list so I know I will always have a good supply of them, and I will put this snack on my weekly food planner to ensure I will remember to sit down and enjoy it.'
- Treat yourself with kindness and be patient with your recovery.

## How to contact a registered dietitian

For information and advice related to healthy eating and nutrition, call 8-1-1 from anywhere in Canada (except in Manitoba: 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) to request to speak with a registered dietitian. Translation services are available in most provinces and territories.

## Where to next

- Read [the recommendation](#) by CAN-PCC on not taking taurine supplements.
- Read more about [how healthy eating pattern can help your mood](#).
- Review these resources for recipe ideas and inspirations:
  - [Cooking for One or Two People: Easy Meals to Make](#)
  - [Canada's food guide](#)
    - You can click on the button that reads 'Food guide snapshot – Other languages' to find this list in your language.
  - [the Food Guide for First Nations, Inuit and Metis](#)
  - [Healthy snacks for adults](#)
  - [101 Square meals: easy recipes for everyday life](#)
  - [5 healthy meals with 5 ingredients](#)
- Review various types of restrictive diets: [ketogenic diets](#), [low histamine diets](#), [low FODMAP diet](#).
- Download and use these documents for healthy eating: [healthy grocery list](#), [weekly menu planner](#)

- Learn more about irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) on [HealthLinkBC](#) and [the Association of UK Dietitians \(BDA\)](#).
  - You can use [this journal template](#) to keep track of your food and behaviour triggers.
  - Click [here](#) to review the Bristol stool chart.
  - Click [here](#) to learn more about myIBS, a free tracking app for IBS.
- Read more about [Vitamin D and your health](#).
- Call 8-1-1 from anywhere in Canada (except in Manitoba: 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) to request to speak with a registered dietitian.