

# What Can I Eat at Home After Being in the Intensive Care Unit with COVID-19?

Food is Medicine

## What happened when I was in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU)?

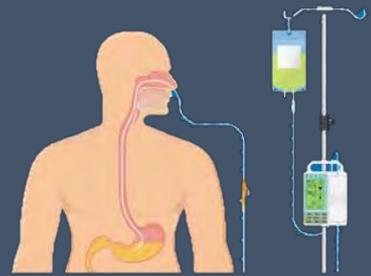
COVID-19 is a new infection that affects the lungs and can make you very sick. Some patients, like yourself or your loved one, were admitted to the ICU to help you breathe with a ventilator.



The ICU health care team, consisting of physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, dietitians and other professionals, worked together to provide you or your loved one's care.

## How was I fed in the ICU?

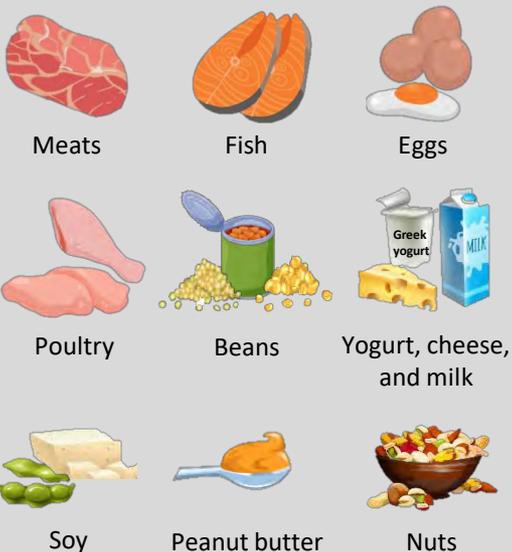
To fight this infection, you might have been fed into the stomach with a tube that was put into your nose or mouth or, you received nutrition through a vein. The feeding tube might have remained in place when you left the ICU to go to another ward or it may have been removed in the ICU.



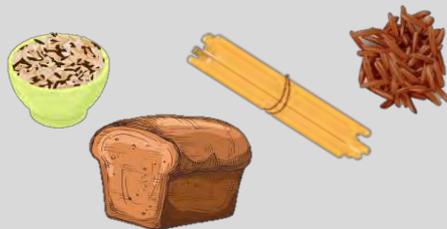
## What should I eat and drink when I get home?

At home, you may feel too weak or tired to eat, and notice you have lost weight. You also might be eating and drinking less than before you got sick. This is completely normal, however, you need to prevent further weight loss to rebuild your strength. Here are some tips to rebuild your strength, grow your muscles, and get you back to your usual daily activities:

Eat foods with protein at each meal.  
Foods high in protein are:



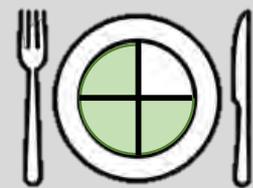
Try to have whole grain breads, pastas, rice, or cereals at each meal.



Try to eat vegetables and fruits at each meal.



Keep track of what you are eating at each meal. For example, write down if you have eaten none (0%), 25%, 50% 75% or all (100% eaten).



If you are eating 50% or less than normal, make a milkshake with Greek yogurt or buy a nutrition supplement (meal replacement) for between meals. They may be purchased at your local grocery or drugstore.

Try to drink 8-10 cups of fluid per day.



Water



Diluted fruit juice



Milk



Nutrition supplement

## What if I am having problems eating at home?

Problem	What can I do?
<b>Poor appetite, fatigue, or feeling full quickly</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat small frequent meals 4-6 times per day or eat every couple of hours</li> <li>• Eat foods high in protein first at meal times</li> <li>• Eat high calorie and protein foods such as cheese, high fat and Greek yogurts, peanut butter, cream cheese, or cream soups with whole milk</li> <li>• Add gravies and sauces to meat, poultry, and side dishes</li> <li>• Drink milkshakes or meal replacements/protein drinks between meals</li> <li>• Consider a multivitamin supplement if you are not eating enough (50% or less)</li> </ul>
<b>Taste changes</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat foods that are bland to start and then add flavour</li> <li>• Try colder foods to start since hot foods can have a strong taste</li> <li>• Add sugar, salt, seasonings to flavour food</li> <li>• Use sour candies, mints or gum before and after meals if your mouth is dry</li> <li>• Brush teeth regularly</li> </ul>
<b>Swallowing</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow any diet instructions that were provided to you if a swallowing assessment was done</li> </ul>

## What are some other tips?



### Physical activity

- It is important to move your body and be active on a daily basis
- Ask to be referred to a physical therapist, exercise therapist, or kinesiologist who can create an exercise program to make you stronger



### Sleep

- Listen to your body. You may need more sleep than usual
- Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day



### Help from family and friends

- It is normal that you might need help with grocery shopping, cooking, or eating
- Have family or friends help prepare meals, shop for groceries, and even help with cleaning
- Make sure to follow COVID-19 guidelines

## What if I am having a hard time emotionally or physically at home after being in the ICU?

For some people, leaving the ICU and starting on the road to recovery can be scary. Part of this can be caused by not remembering what happened to you in the ICU and not knowing what the next steps to your recovery will look like. Take it one day at a time. Here are some additional resources to help describe what may happen after being in the ICU:

My ICU Guide: [www.myicuguide.ca/](http://www.myicuguide.ca/)

ICU Steps-The Intensive Care Patient Support Charity: [www.icusteps.org](http://www.icusteps.org)

NHS Critical Care Recovery: [www.criticalcarerecovery.com/](http://www.criticalcarerecovery.com/)

Post-Intensive Care Syndrome: [www.sccm.org/MyICUCare/THRIVE/Post-intensive-Care-Syndrome/](http://www.sccm.org/MyICUCare/THRIVE/Post-intensive-Care-Syndrome/)

## What if I have more nutrition questions?

Talk to your dietitian, doctor, or the hospital care team.



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Canadian Nutrition Society  
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