



## Managing Post-COVID-19 Nutrition-Related Challenges

Post-COVID involves a wide range of lingering symptoms, many of which may impact your nutrition status. Changes in taste and smell, fatigue, and gastrointestinal related concerns all pose challenges in eating a healthy diet. These problems can be short-term but they may still affect your appetite and overall eating experience. Here are some suggestions to help you manage these concerns.

### Change in Taste

- Keep your mouth clean by brushing your teeth and tongue after meals. If you can't brush your teeth after eating, use sugar free mints/gum or drink mint or ginger tea to reduce after tastes
- Try adding tart foods to meals such as lemon, vinegar, or pickled foods to stimulate taste buds
- Add condiments to change the flavor, especially for foods not well tolerated
  - Add salsa, Parmesan cheese, vinegars, olives, capers, salad dressing, mustard, ketchup, or BBQ sauce
  - Season with strong spices such as onion, garlic, oregano, rosemary, basil, dill, chili powder, paprika, cumin, and curry powder
- If meat tastes unpleasant, marinate in wine, Italian dressing, low sodium soy sauce, or a bottled marinade
  - If animal protein is difficult to eat, try eggs, tofu, yogurt, cheese, beans, lentils, peanut butter or protein shakes as alternative protein sources
- If strong flavors are not appealing, choose bland foods such as soup, potatoes, rice, chicken, steamed vegetables, eggs, yogurt, cottage cheese, bread, oatmeal, cereal, fruit, and smoothies
- Try frozen fruit for a different mouthfeel
- Make your plate appealing and include different textures and colors
- Use plastic utensils if there is a metallic taste in your mouth
- Create a "safe food list" for well tolerated food, especially if others are helping with cooking or shopping. Update weekly or monthly as tastes can change over time

## Change in Smell

- Focus on other sensory factors such as texture, temperature, and color
  - Add foods such as nuts, seeds, raw vegetables, or tortilla chips on top of softer textured food
  - Experiment with having hot and cold food on your plate for a different mouth sensation
  - Choose colorful fruits and vegetables and plate food in a visually appealing way
- If the smell of food is bothersome, choose cold foods to minimize odors. Try sandwiches, wraps, salads, smoothies, cottage cheese, yogurt, and fruit
- If beverages have strong smells, drink out of a closed container with a straw
- Eat in a well-ventilated room with a fan or window. Avoid eating in warm rooms
- Be patient and ready to adapt. Foods may smell different one week to the next, so it's important to try food more than once
- Use a smell training kit to aid in your smell recovery. Here is an example:  
<https://abscent.org/support-us/shop/kits>

## Fatigue

- Eat breakfast within 1-2 hours of waking up
- Limit simple carbs like candy or juice. Instead choose complex carbs (such as whole wheat bread, brown rice, quinoa, fruit, or oatmeal) for slower energy release and to prevent "sugar crashes"
- Eat snacks between meals to keep energy levels up – combine complex carbohydrates with protein such as berries with Greek yogurt
- Avoid eating very large meals, especially those that are comprised mostly of carbohydrates
- Stay well hydrated

## Gastrointestinal Dysmotility

- Eat 5-6 small, frequent meals per day
- Chew food well and eat slowly
- Avoid high fat or high fiber meals since they move slowly through the digestive system. Limit foods such as fried food, heavy sauces, red meat, raw vegetables, and beans/lentils.
- Drink plenty of water

## Ask your doctor for a referral to meet with a dietitian if you:

- Continue to have difficulty eating adequate amounts despite following these suggestions
- Experience weight loss without trying
- Have other medical conditions/food restrictions that require specific dietary modifications
- Have not seen improvement in GI symptoms and wish to try an elimination diet.
  - Elimination diets serve to identify possible foods/food groups that can cause GI symptoms such as gas, bloating, diarrhea, and constipation. These foods are removed from the diet for about 4 weeks and systematically incorporated back in to test for tolerance

## Resources

- Free downloadable cookbook for those experiencing taste and smell changes during COVID <https://lifekitchen.co.uk/product/free-taste-flavour-book/>
- Find blogs, recipes, and connect with others with smell loss <https://abscent.org/insights-blog/food-corner>