

By Dr TEE E SIONG

THESE are difficult and challenging times in many ways.

To deal with the extended movement control order (MCO) to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, we have to change our way of living – we do not have an option.

We now have to work from home, as well as find ways to bond with our children now confined at home.

We also need to find ways to keep physically active within the confines of our home, in addition to cooking healthy meals for ourselves and/or our families.

We probably used to eat out a lot or bought takeaway food to eat at home, but this is not really possible now.

Although we can still order food delivery for our meals, the choices are probably more restricted as not all eateries are open at this time and we may be concerned about food hygiene and social distancing.

The better and healthier option is to prepare our own meals at home.

We have to take out the wok or kuali, and apron, in order to have nutritious meals to survive these trying times.

It is challenging if you are someone who has not been cooking regularly at home.

It may be daunting if you have to prepare all three meals for a large family, or even a smaller one of three to four persons.

It is certainly not easy to allocate time for cooking with your work on the computer waiting for you and your kids clamouring for your attention.

It calls for determination. It calls for innovative ideas. It calls for all family members to chip in!

If you have hardly or never cooked before, take this opportunity to learn a new skill.

If you only cooked intermittently previously, make the change.

You will soon develop a skill that some have called a survival skill.

When things return to normal (and it will!), make cooking healthy meals at home a way of life.

This is an investment that will enable you and your family members to fight chronic diseases caused by unhealthy eating, e.g. heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers.

Here are some tips and thoughts to help you cook up those healthy meals.

Getting the groceries

If someone from your family is able to go out to purchase the required food items, they should try their best to make it a quick trip and try to find a quiet or less crowded time to go.

Also, take note of the following:

> Make a shopping list

This is absolutely essential as you would want to find your items quickly to reduce potential exposure to infection.

List similar foods together as they can usually be found in the same aisle or area of the supermarket.

Buy only the essential items; you may have to forgo your treats or comfort foods at this time.

> Look for alternatives

You may not be able to find your regular brand, or favourite vegetable or fish, so you will have to make do with alternatives within the same food category.

> Canned and frozen foods

You will probably need to buy some of these at this time as you may need to supplement fresh foods that may be in short supply.

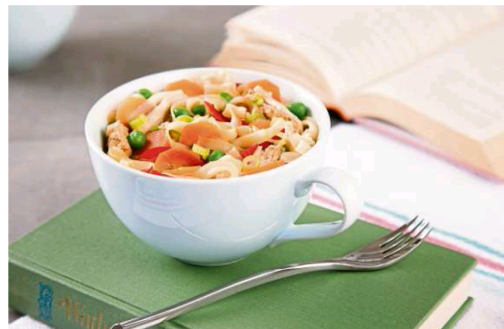
Look for canned fish, a variety of canned beans and frozen vegetables like carrots and peas.

‘Wok’ it up at home

Boost your immune system to fight off the coronavirus by cooking your own nutritious meals while staying home.



With everyone at home during the MCO, the whole family can get together to cook healthy meals. — 123rf.com



If you are not used to cooking, you can start out with one-pot meals like this one-pot chicken noodles with carrots and peas, which are easy to prepare.

> Don't overstock

Excessive purchasing of food will just result in it being spoilt, especially fresh food.

There is no need to panic buy; there is enough food supply throughout the enhanced MCO period.

> Shop safe

Follow the tips on hygiene practices shared by the health authorities, e.g. social distancing while out of your home, cleaning the trolley handle before using it and washing your hands with soap and water before and after handling your groceries.

It is also important to touch common items as little as possible when out, e.g. door handles, staircase railings, escalator handrails and life buttons.

If you are concerned about going out, you could consider shopping online.

But it is going to be very challenging, as I have discovered; the online outlets are jammed up with orders and are not able to deliver all orders.

You might have to find alternative ways.

I have my regular fruit stall send my purchases to me using an e-hailing car, and I requested my fishmonger and mineral water supplier to bring my fish and mineral water respectively to the house.

This is where loyalty to vendors pays!

Healthy eating practices

We are fighting a deadly enemy and should do all that is necessary to keep the coronavirus from entering our body.

We must be sure to follow all the medical and social-distancing advice given by the authorities.

However, should this invisible enemy manage to enter our body, we want to ensure that we are able to fight off the virus.

A healthy diet is the best way to boost our immunity to battle any dangerous germs; no one food item is going to be able to do this.

Healthy eating guidelines that nutritionists have provided over

the years are still valid at this time.

They may be “old fashioned”, but they are the most effective ways to beef up our immunity.

Yes, you have probably heard of these guidelines before, but have you been practising them?

Be disciplined, be consistent and practise healthy eating now and always.

> Consume more vegetables and fruits

These contain phytonutrients, vitamins and minerals that can act as antioxidants to boost up your immune system.

Consume a variety of vegetables and fruits with different colours to ensure that you are getting a variety of these nutrients.

Make (unsweetened) juices of vegetables and fruits so that you can increase your intake easily.

> Eat balanced meals in appropriate amounts

Follow the principle of Balance, Moderation and Variety (BMV) of a healthy diet: take Balanced meals that contain the key food groups; consume Moderate amounts so as not to overeat; and choose a Variety of vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, beans etc.

This will provide the appropriate amounts of energy and nutrients for your body's need, including strengthening the immune system.

And don't waste food – this is particularly crucial at this time when some people may not be able to stock up as much food at one go due to their financial or living situation.

> Practise mindful snacking

Be mindful of any extra calorie intake as you are likely to be sitting down more with your eyes glued to the screen for the latest news and to do your work.

If you need to snack, opt for healthier options, e.g. those low in sugar, salt, calories and fat, and high in protein.

Opt for fruits and vegetables, or nuts, seeds and beans, such as



boiled chickpeas, edamame and mixed nuts (in small amounts). Avoid munching from a large bag or box of snacks; portion them out to prevent overeating.

> Guard your gut

An important way to beef up your immunity is to ensure that you have a healthy gastrointestinal system.

A healthy diet is vital to promoting a healthy gut, maintaining regular bowel movement and promoting the growth of friendly bacteria.

Do ensure that you have an adequate intake of dietary fibre (good sources include whole grains, legumes and vegetables).

Make sure that you drink sufficient water regularly throughout the day.

And do consume probiotic-containing foods and beverages (good sources include cultured milk drinks and yoghurt).

Tips for cooking

Here are some tips to help you cook healthier:

> Cook smart

Pick recipes you can handle. It is not wise to start with complicated recipes if you are not used to cooking, or are busy juggling work and family at home.

Consider one-pot meals as they are balanced, containing grains, proteins and vegetables, and are easier to prepare.

> Choose healthier cooking methods

Reduce deep-frying and other cooking methods that use a lot of oil.

Use healthier methods such as blanching, roasting, baking, stir-frying or steaming.

> Use healthier ingredients

Use less oil, salt, sugar and santan in your cooking and use lean meat as much as possible.

> Use natural herbs and spices

These will help add flavour to your dishes in lieu of salt, sugar, oil and santan.

Lime or lemon juice are also good options to add some flavour.

Whipping up healthy meals at home is the way towards healthy nutrition, which will help boost your immunity to fight off the coronavirus and other germs.

Yes, Covid-19 may kill, but unhealthy eating habits kill far more people, albeit slowly and not so dramatically through diet-related chronic diseases.

Take this opportunity to make healthy cooking at home a way of life for your family, even when life returns to normal.

It is particularly crucial that we impress upon our children the importance of healthy eating so that they will make it a lifelong habit.

Dr Tee E Siong is a nutritionist and president of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia. For more information, email starhealth@thestar.com.my.

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