

Coronavirus outbreak: healthy meals from limited ingredients

With the coronavirus outbreak dominating our lives at the moment, one of the issues we face is that some foods we would normally buy like pasta or canned tomatoes are not always available when we go shopping. Below are some ideas about using food items that might be less popular and still on the shelves. It can also be a good time to try out a packet or can of something that you bought but have never got round to cooking!

Do try and look round the whole supermarket or shop to see what is available – by using more of the ingredients in store, we will save store cupboard ingredients for others to buy. Where possible, try and look for a selection of foods from across the main food groups – fruit and vegetables, starchy foods like pasta and grains, protein foods, including beans and lentils and dairy or plant based alternatives.

Pasta, rice and grains

Pasta and rice are really popular staples but have been selling out – so, if this is the case you could look for alternatives that are available. Packs of noodles, couscous, bulgur wheat, quinoa or barley may still be on the shelves. You may also find ready prepared packs of grains available; although these are usually more expensive than dried they can be a convenient option for a quick meal. You can swap these for pasta or rice in a dish you make already, for example you can combine couscous with a Bolognese sauce, add quinoa or barley to soups or stews or look up a new recipe for inspiration.

Beans and lentils

Canned beans like kidney beans, chickpeas or borlotti beans are a handy store cupboard item for making quick nutritious meals providing fibre, protein and micronutrients like folate and iron. You can simply fry these with some onions or other vegetables or add them to grains with some herbs or spices. You can also use them in salads, stews and soups. Dried beans or chick peas can be really good value although they do need to be soaked overnight and boiled before use. But dried lentils can be added straight to dishes like pasta sauces or curries to cook.

Canned vegetables and fish

Sweetcorn and tuna may be the first to sell out but it's worth trying other canned foods. Other canned fish like salmon, mackerel or sardines can be added to sauces, made into dips or served with salad or toast and these all count as an oily fish. They are also a great source of protein, vitamin D and omega -3 fats.

Other canned vegetables include spinach, peas and carrots but you could try more unusual kinds like artichoke hearts or heart of palm. Canned vegetables can be ideal for adding straight to a curry (e.g. spinach and chickpea) or for making a soup or stew.

Canned tomatoes have been reported as selling out in many supermarkets. If you don't find them, you could look out for tubes or cans of tomato paste or see if jars of ready-made tomato-based sauces are available.

Nut butters

You can add nut butters to Asian inspired noodle dishes or curries or just have with fruit or wholemeal bread for a snack. Nuts are a source of micronutrients such as magnesium, potassium, iron, zinc, vitamin E and B vitamins and they are also high in fibre.

Dried fruit

Dried fruit provide fibre and nutrients like copper and iron and can be added to breakfast cereal or porridge, mixed with yogurt or used in puddings like rice pudding. They can also work in savoury dishes like stews or tagines, or mixed with grains and pulses to make a salad. Because they are high in sugar it's best to keep them to mealtimes rather than as snacks.

Information sourced from:

<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/helpingyoueatwell/covid19healthymeals.html>