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COVID-19 coronavirus: how to eat healthily from the cupboard and freezer

With new government guidelines telling us to minimise trips to buy food and other essentials as much as possible, getting out to buy fresh foods regularly will be a challenge. We look at the cupboard and freezer basics that will fill you up and provide plenty of nutrients.

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Many of us never delve into the far reaches of our food cupboards and freezer drawers, preferring to shop for the 'usual suspects' we think we need. Now is an opportune time to use up the products hidden away in our kitchens and to get creative with what's available.

[Priya Tew](#) is an award-winning dietician known for her no-nonsense approach to nutrition on BBC 1's Eat Well For Less.

"While we're [self-isolating](#) and cooking with what we have in, it's still important to think about getting that balance in your diet. So eat [fruit](#), [vegetables](#), protein, [carbohydrates](#) and healthy fats, but you might have to be a bit more creative in how you do that," she says.

Cupboard basics

Most of us have a few long-lost tins of beans, pulses and soups in the back of our cupboards. Make a tinned soup go further by using it as the basis for a sauce or a stew, using the beans and pulses and whatever vegetables you have available.

"Nuts and dried fruit are good supplies to have in, they're great for snacking and provide an energy boost," says Tew. "Lentils are an easy protein source and so is nut butter. Both keep well in the cupboard."

If you're out of stock cubes, or herbs and spices, kitchen staples such as Marmite, ketchup and chilli sauce can add heat and flavour to your cooking.

Freezer essentials

If you have a freezer, it's worth spending a day cooking up meals in bulk to freeze. That way, if you don't feel like cooking or haven't got ingredients in, you have some easy options.

"Always have a loaf of sliced bread in your freezer and some milk," says Tew. "Frozen veg is easy to use, as it's already chopped, and Quorn mince keeps well frozen. Just add a tin of tomatoes and a stock cube and you've got a nutritious meal with pasta."

Soups, sauces and stews are great to freeze as are most fruits and vegetables. Before freezing fruit and vegetables, wash, dry and divide into handy portions. Blanching most vegetables will keep them at their best. To do this, drop them into boiling hot water, then immediately into iced water before drying and freezing. Herbs and leafy greens can also be chopped, blanched and frozen this way.

Other foodstuffs, including meat, fish, raw dough, breads and cakes, do well in the freezer, as do some items you might not have considered. Butter, shelled nuts, flour, grated cheese and raw eggs (cracked into containers) can also be frozen.

It's best to avoid freezing cooked eggs, yoghurt, blocks of cheese and low-fat dairy products though. Cooked pasta often has a soggy consistency when frozen and defrosted; undercooking it before the freezing process may help prevent this; it will then cook through when reheated.

Defrost food in the bottom of the fridge overnight or in a microwave on the defrost setting. Ensure it is fully defrosted before use. Fruit and veg will usually keep for up to a year in the freezer. But it's best to use foods containing fish, fresh dairy or raw or lightly cooked eggs within a month.

Plan your shop

If you've cleared out your cupboards and need to re-stock, Tew's advice is to think about what you actually need and how foods and ingredients might work together.

"Get some basics in," she says. "But plan ahead. A really good idea is to write out a list of maybe fourteen meals that you could cook from scratch that use store cupboard ingredients so you don't have to keep going to the shop every few days to buy fresh produce."

Choose carbohydrates such as flour, pasta, rice and other grains that can be easily stored; tinned or frozen products such as beans and pulses, vegetables and fruits, and meat and fish are also useful staples. Basic condiments including olive oil, bottled sauces, stock cubes and dried herbs and spices will also come in handy.

"Rather than just panic buying and getting 25 tins of chopped tomatoes because they're on offer or you're worried about running out, think about what you're going to do with them," advises Tew. "Otherwise you'll get to the point where you start cooking and can't go out and you won't have the rest of the ingredients. Look at what you will actually need for a couple of weeks based on your plan and just buy that. Include freezer meals for added convenience."

Try something different

If you visit the supermarket and find that stocks of your go-to favourites are running low, think of it as an opportunity to try something different.

"Tinned fish is a great staple to have in the cupboard," says Tew. "But if you find the supermarket shelves are empty of favourites like sardines and tuna in oil, try sardines in tomato sauce. It makes a quick and nutritious meal, either on toast or as a jacket potato topping."

Other less popular seafood such as tinned crab, herrings and shellfish can also be used as a substitute.

"When I went to the frozen veg section the other day, all that was left was Brussels sprouts and edamame beans," adds Tew. "They might not be what you'd usually buy, but edamame beans are a great source of protein and Brussels can be one of your five-a-day veg."

If you're faced with empty shelves and foods you don't usually buy, pick up your phone and try Googling a recipe that includes what is available. You'd be surprised at the tasty meals you can whip up with frozen edamame beans, Brussels sprouts and numerous other foods you might not ordinarily buy.

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