

Importance of nutrition during COVID-19 pandemic

As of 16th June, the number of confirmed cases globally has reached 8,128,491, with 439,427 deaths. As per the OCHA Dashboard for Pakistan, there are 148,921 confirmed cases of COVID-19 affected people as of 16th June (78% men, 22% women). Provincial figures include 55,878 Punjab, 55,581 Sindh, 18,472 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 8,327 Balochistan, 1,143 Gilgit-Baltistan, 8,857 Islamabad, 663 AJK, with 2,839 deaths overall.

Approximately 40% of Pakistan's 212 M population lives below the poverty line and a majority of Pakistan's population has a median age of 22.8. The majority of COVID-19 cases thus have been in the 20-39 age group, while only 28% of the affected population is over 50 years of age. This trend is an anomaly from global examples. Case management facilities are few and lack trained staff required equipment and supplies. Finally, the community mobilization and sensitization activities are still weak; risk communication still needs to reach people in more remote and rural areas effectively. Fear, depression, and anxiety are likely common reactions in all affected areas.

The pandemic is causing a lot of changes in our daily lives. We are staying home, avoiding unnecessary outdoor movement, social distancing, and unable to dine out at restaurants. It is easy to slip into unhealthy eating habits during our stay-at-home or work from home period, but with a little thought and preparation, maintaining a healthy diet doesn't have to be a chore.

Good nutrition is always important, but during this pandemic, it's even more important because a well-balanced diet of nutritious foods helps support a strong immune system. Avoid or reduce sugar, fat, and salt in order to lower the risk of gaining weight, obesity, heart diseases, stroke, diabetes etc.

The World Health Organization (WHO) also emphasizes on the importance of nutrition during the outbreak. The WHO suggests eating fresh and unprocessed foods every day. Fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, whole grain (maize, millet, oats, wheat, brown rice), starchy tubers or roots (potato, yam, cassava), and food from animal sources including milk, meat, eggs, and fish are important to be added to your daily intake.

Water transports nutrients and compounds in blood, regulates the body temperature, and lubricates and cushions joints. It is highly recommended to consume water after regular intervals throughout the day. Besides water, other drinks including fresh juices, smoothies, tea, and coffee are also beneficial in keeping your body hydrated.