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**GURU GOBIND SINGH COLLEGE FOR WOMEN**

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## 39. COVID-19 AND THE ELDERLY POPULATION: DIETARY GUIDELINES

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### COVID-19 AND THE ELDERLY POPULATION: DIETARY GUIDELINES

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#### INTRODUCTION

The current COVID 19 pandemic has taken the entire world by surprise and still doesn't show any signs of slowing down. COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease caused by a new corona virus called SARS-CoV-2. It was first reported in November 2019 from Wuhan in China, after which it spread to the entire world.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include high fever, a dry cough and extreme fatigue. Other symptoms include loss of taste or smell, nasal congestion, sore throat, headache, muscle or joint pain, nausea or vomiting, chills or dizziness

Severe COVID-19 disease may include shortness of breath, loss of appetite, confusion, persistent pain or pressure in the chest and high body temperature (above 38 °C). Other less common symptoms may be reduced consciousness, seizures, anxiety, strokes and nerve damage.

Among those who develop symptoms, most patients recover from the disease without needing hospitalization. About 15% of those infected may require oxygen and 5% can go on to be critically ill and need intensive care. Complications leading to death may include respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) and/or multi organ failure.

#### COVID IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ELDERLY

The present situation is very disturbing, with personal isolation, quarantine and social distancing being the need of the hour. Though all age groups are being affected by it, the elderly are especially vulnerable, owing to their weaker immunity. There are other serious concerns like hypertension, diabetes, cardiac disease, lung infections, etc which lower their immunity and maybe adversely affected by COVID. These senior citizens have a higher risk of developing severe corona virus infection which may require hospitalization. Mortality rate is also significantly higher in the elderly.

We are well aware that nutrition plays an important role in maintaining and preserving health. Immunity boosting foods and those rich in vitamins and minerals can surely help to strengthen immunity.

With advancing age, the immune system becomes slower in responding. Vaccines may not be as effective or give prolonged protection. Healing also tends to slow down as there are fewer immune cells in action.

According to a study by Bajaj et al, there is a progressive decline in the immune system's ability to fight infections. It affects an individual's susceptibility to infections and also determines the severity of the disease, its course and clinical outcomes.

It therefore, becomes imperative that special attention is given to their diet, health, and needs, which maybe compounded by co-existing health problems.

A diet pattern with minimum regular exercises can ensure fitness and optimum health, while also taking into account their sleep-rest patterns and psychological conditions.

#### DIET:

"We are what we eat"

Foods we eat affect our health and influence our nutritional status. Eating balanced meals according to the recommended dietary allowances will go a long way in promoting and preserving our health.

We must aim to eat fresh and minimally processed foods, while following portion control. Overcooking and over-processing of food leads to the loss of important vitamins.

Dining alone or increased isolation may cause a loss of appetite in the elderly, which in turn, leads to a reduction in the food intake. This may make it difficult to achieve recommended intakes for nutrients such as protein, vitamins and minerals. This leads to a loss of body weight and muscle mass.

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