

# Nutritional Advice for Thalassemia Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic



*(Pictured: A variety of citrus fruits)*

*A strong immune system can help to protect a person from severe complications of COVID-19, so taking steps to strengthen the immune system are advised for individual with thalassemia. One important factor in maintaining a healthy immune system is proper nutrition.*

*The Thalassaemia International Federation has issued a position statement on COVID-19 and thalassemia which includes suggestions on strengthening the immune system, including the following recommendations related to nutrition for those with thalassemia.*

Regarding nutrition in particular, thalassaemia patients are encouraged to consume natural sources containing vitamin C (citrus fruits), vitamin D (sardine, mackerel, dairy products), zinc (legumes, seeds and nuts) and omega-3 fatty acids (sardine, mackerel) as these foods have been found in applied basic research to provide necessary vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that boost the immune

response. Caution is advised if patients turn to dietary supplements as the danger of over-supplementation (especially for vitamin C) is quite considerable. While there are no clinical data available, there is a belief that probiotics (especially preparations with lactobacilli and bifidobacteria species) could help against most viral infections, COVID-19 included, and their use towards this direction should be further investigated given their rather safe profile.

Other potentially beneficial phytochemicals against the coronavirus infection, with strong preclinical evidence but not actually tested on human subjects in randomized clinical trials, include procyanidins, lectins, luteolin, hesperetin, catechins and sulforaphanes. They are all found within a flavonoid-rich plant-based diet. Caution is again advised regarding possible food-drug interactions.

Farmakis D, Giakoumis A, Cannon L, Angastiniotis M, Eleftheriou A. COVID-19 and thalassaemia: A position statement of the Thalassaemia International Federation. *Eur J Haematol*. 2020 Oct; 105(4): 378-386. doi: 10.1111/ejh.13476.

<b>Name of Phytochemical</b>	<b>Some foods in which it is found</b>
Procyanidin	Apples, cranberries, black tea, green tea
Lectin	Beans, legumes, eggs, tomatoes, potatoes
Luteolin	Radicchio, celery, artichokes, peppers
Hesperetin	Citrus fruits
Catechin	Apples, blackberries, dark chocolate
Sulforaphane	Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower

Please note that the above information is intended to suggest options to consider but is not comprehensive. In addition, it is always advisable to check with your physician or health team before making significant changes to your diet, especially in terms of determining if changing levels of certain vitamins or nutrients may have an interaction with current medications.

*(Chickpeas are one good source of zinc.)*

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[www.thalassemia.org](http://www.thalassemia.org)

