

How to Help Defend Yourself Against Viral Infections

Many of my patients have been asking me about the new Coronavirus and what to do about it.

I wish we had all the answers, however this virus is so new we still don't know much about this latest Coronavirus. Researchers have been working hard and have made some strides in determining the specifics of its behaviour and how it develops but have yet to develop a specific treatment for it.

Currently, what is known is that it is most likely spread between humans through droplets from sneezing, coughing, and runny nose, touching infected surfaces, much the same way the flu virus is transmitted. Common symptoms of coronavirus are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. These symptoms can range from mild to severe.

But that is all we know so far. We don't know if it's stronger or more severe than a seasonal flu, and the fact that we don't know a lot about it has generated a great deal of attention.

HOW TO HELP PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST VIRAL INFECTIONS

The World Health Organization advises measures to "reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses", including coronavirus -- frequent hand washing, avoiding contact with anyone with a fever or cough, seeking medical care when if you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing. These basic measures are good advice at any time.

Another measure you can take is to focus on your immune system.

We are exposed to viruses, both new and long-established, almost continuously. The action you can

take now to help protect yourself from viral and other infectious agents is to work on your immune system.

Having and maintaining a strong immune system is good advice for everyone, including those who do not often get sick. We do, after all, live in what The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy calls "a hyperinfectious disease world". New viruses emerge at an estimated rate of three to four per year. Your body's immune system is its defense and since you are exposed to new viruses at this rate, it needs to be strong and healthy.

DON'T WAIT TO GET SICK

It is much more difficult to treat an infection once you have it. The amount of work needed to build an immune system to fight the infection is much more intense if your immune system is not healthy before you get sick. There are supplements and medications that might help when you are sick, but you could expect that much higher doses for a longer period of time may be required for your recovery.

A much better strategy is to build up your immune system now, before exposure to contagious pathogens. A strong immune system will either prevent an illness from taking hold in the first place or, if you do get sick it should hopefully be mild and of short duration. While we can't prevent everything, we can work to try to make a viral infection much more manageable.

STRENGTHEN YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

There are a number of things that you can do to enable your immune system to do its job:

Diet

At the risk of being accused of harping on the subject (but, really, it can't be said too often or too loudly), refined sugar will harm your immune system, leaving you more vulnerable to viral, fungal, and bacterial infection.

Refined sugar inhibits the activity of white blood cells, the cells that (among other things) create the antibodies that fight infections. Refined sugar will also disrupt intestinal flora (the good bacteria) that is needed to help fight off bad bacteria and viruses. The harmful effect of refined sugar on your immune system is dose dependent, which means to say that the more refined sugar you eat and drink, the bigger the hit your immune system will take. It doesn't take enormous quantities of refined sugar to do damage; ingesting refined sugar as infrequently as once or twice a week can affect your immune system.

Refined sugar is very easy to ingest without meaning to. Obvious sources are pastries, candies, chocolate, and other sweets but it is also present in almost all processed food. Food processors use refined sugar (which goes by many other names) to enhance colour, flavour, and texture and to extend the shelf life of their products.

Sugar cravings can be difficult to curb so we have developed some [healthy substitutes and strategies](#) to help you and your family resist temptation.

The vital importance of eliminating refined sugar from your diet, or at least minimizing it to the extent possible, cannot be overemphasized. While there's no such thing as a diet that's perfect for everyone, it is certain that whole foods, meaning unprocessed foods that are free from additives, will help enable your immune system to protect you from viral and bacterial infection.

Food and Exercise in Moderation

A very large meal can take a long time to digest, so overeating can tax your bowels and divert energy

away from your immune system to the digestive system. When we say "overeating" as it relates to the immune system, we're not talking about eating disorders or similar conditions that may require professional help, and we are not suggesting that everyday eating is a problem. What can be an issue to the immune system is that an extremely large meal is difficult to digest and diverts energy from the immune system to digestion.

We're also not suggesting that you should starve yourself or immediately launch into a fasting program. Undereating can also cause problems because various nutrient shortfalls can also weaken a patient's immune system.

Appropriately-sized healthy meals at regular intervals will produce the best health results including immune system function.

Taking part in grueling and overly strenuous exercise can likewise adversely affect your immune system because your body's energy is diverted away from the immune system for the intense exercise.

This is especially true for people that are just getting back into exercising after not having exercised for a long time. People who exercise on a regular basis are less likely to have the draining effect of vigorous exercise; it's still possible, but it's considerably less likely. It's the people who don't exercise on a regular basis and then start or who significantly increase the intensity where we most often see a drain on their immune system.

If you have ever noticed that you get into exercise and then get sick shortly after, the reason is that the vigorous exercise that you're not used to is draining the energy from your immune system. What we often recommend is that you stop the exercise until you recover and then work on strengthening your immune system so that you don't get sick with exercise.

There are many benefits to be enjoyed from regular exercise, but it does need to be the exercise that's right for you.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C has long been recognized as indispensable to the immune system. Human bodies do not synthesize Vitamin C and so must obtain it from food and supplements. Again, diet plays a crucial role, but diet alone may not supply a sufficient amount of Vitamin C for a strong immune system. Vitamin C supplements may be required.

How much is enough? What other vitamins and minerals should be taken with Vitamin C? There is no "one size fits all" answer to those questions – everyone's requirement is different, and the vitamin and minerals regimen should be custom-tailored to address individual needs.

Many people have reported benefit from high dose Vitamin C injections, citing improved immune system functioning and infrequent to no colds and flus.

Hydration

"Drink plenty of fluids". That's good advice, as it applies to good quality water (coffee, alcohol and soft drinks don't count) even when you're healthy. All of the body's cells, organs, and protective systems need water to function. Water helps to regulate body temperature, remove waste products including viral or infectious waste through the kidneys and bowels, and even helps to lubricate the joints.

Don't wait until you're thirsty to have a drink of water. The sensation of thirst lags behind actual dehydration. By the time you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated to some degree. How can you tell if you're drinking enough water to be properly hydrated? As a rule of thumb, you should be urinating every two hours.

MUCH MORE CAN BE DONE TO HELP PROTECT YOURSELF FROM VIRAL INFECTIONS

The best defense against viral infections is a strong immune system. Doing such things as keeping to a good diet, exercise that's right for you, staying hydrated and making sure you get sufficient nutrients are effective basic actions you can take to strengthen your immune system.

It doesn't end there, though. There is much more that can be done to build up your immune system to help make you more resistant to viruses and other types of infection. There may be other factors that are affecting your immune system that should be addressed. For example, a candida yeast overgrowth or food sensitivities are conditions that could affect your immune system.

We can look in detail at your overall health and suggest steps that you can take right now to improve your immune system and help guard against viral and other potential infections.

We can help you build your immune system. Call Green Apple Health Care at (780) 485-9468 and let's get your immune system as strong as possible.