

Myths and Facts on COVID-19:

Food, Supplements and Your Immune System



in·fo·dem·ic

/,ɪnfə'demɪk/

noun

noun: **infodemic**; plural noun: **infodemics**

Infodemic: “An over-abundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.” (WHO, 2020)

With an overwhelming amount of information online and media influencers promoting so-called ‘cures’ for coronavirus, it can be hard to decipher myth from fact. Let’s take a look at some of the common questions and claims circulating around with regards to COVID-19.

Can I “boost” my immune system?

The immune system is a complicated system. The short answer to this question is **no**. We can’t *boost* our immune system so that it’s functioning at a higher than normal level. However, many different factors can impact one’s immune system including: age, genetics, disease, sleep, smoking, nutritional status/deficiencies, as well as other things like stress and our environment. Some of these factors we can change and others we can’t. Of course, it’s not helpful to stress over what we can’t change!

Focusing on positive lifestyle behaviors like managing our stress, eating a variety of foods, and quitting smoking can help **support** our immune systems. However, supporting your immune system does not mean you will prevent or treat diseases. You may be wondering, “What about if I do get sick? Will I not get as sick if I am doing what I can to support my immune system?” The answer is *maybe*, but there are still many other complex factors involved in your immune response which makes things a bit more complicated.

Key point: We can help support our immune health through positive lifestyle behaviors, but this does not mean that they will prevent or treat diseases like coronavirus.



Can eating specific foods or supplements help prevent or treat the new coronavirus?

Unfortunately, **no**. You may have heard people promoting supplements to combat the coronavirus, such as: Vitamin D, Vitamin C, zinc, garlic or elderberry. However, there is currently no evidence that these supplements or foods protect people from COVID-19.

While there is some evidence for certain nutrients having a small benefit with the cold or flu, this **cannot be extended to COVID-19**. Further research is needed on the effectiveness and safety of different supplements or products. At this time, Health Canada has not approved **any** product or



supplement to prevent, treat or cure COVID-19. Keep in mind that just because a product is considered natural, doesn't necessarily mean it's safe. It's also good to remember that while vitamins which we get from our food are important for good health, high doses of some supplements could actually be harmful. More is not always better!

Eating a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables, can help your body get the different vitamins and minerals that are needed for good health, including the functioning of your immune system. In certain cases, when we are not able to get enough of specific nutrients from foods, supplements may be recommended by your health care provider.

If you have questions about your diet or need for supplements, consult with a Registered Dietitian on your primary care team.

Will sipping water every 15 minutes help prevent coronavirus?

Another myth that has been circulating on social media is the idea that sipping water throughout the day will help to 'wash down' coronavirus and therefore prevent it from infecting someone. **There is no evidence** that this will help to prevent you from contracting COVID-19.



Hydration is important for good health, so drinking adequate water is a good practice. However, keep in mind that drinking excessive water is also not good for you.



How Can I Identify Misinformation? Ask yourself...

- Does it sound like a miracle cure? If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Does it contradict trusted sources? (eg. CDC, WHO, Health Canada). This is a red flag!
- Are they trying to sell me something? Beware of scams.

Key Point: There is lots of misinformation floating around. Be critical with the information and claims you hear or read and stick to trusted sources of information. If you have questions about your health, consult with your medical team.

Further reading and references:

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf>

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters?fbclid=IwAR0cmfVweaaLbr4exZ-0HSr2gmsC20LDT6ZD3DqxKGmMYi_b9CbT86prZh0

<https://examine.com/topics/coronavirus-myths/#supplements>

https://examine.com/topics/coronavirus/?ck_subscriber_id=668678115

<https://www.pennutrition.com/KnowledgePathway.aspx?repid=16006&trid=18279&trcatid=38>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#>

