COVID-19 (coronavirus)
Tips to help boost your immune system

The COVID-19 pandemic has given us more reasons than ever to try to stay healthy. Along with social distancing, wearing masks and hand-washing, boosting our bodies' ability to fight off infection can help keep us safer. It's all about the immune system – a group of cells and proteins that help protect us from viruses and other infections. Though there's no one guaranteed way to fight off the coronavirus or other disease-causing germs, there are steps you can take – starting today – to help keep your immune system in good working order.

Here are some tips to help boost your immune system:

1. **Eat a healthy diet.** Include foods rich in vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, strawberries, spinach and peppers; vitamin B6, found in chicken, green veggies, salmon, tuna and chickpeas; vitamin E, an antioxidant that fights inflammation, found in spinach, nuts and seeds; and vitamin D, found in salmon or fortified foods, such as milk and some juices.

2. **Stay active*.** There are several theories on how exercise may help boost immunity, including helping improve the ability of your white blood cells to fight illness. While your gym may be closed, you can still go for a walk, run or bike ride (while practising social distancing), work out to videos online, or even just dance around the house.

3. **Get enough sleep.** When you are short on sleep, your body produces less of the kind of protein that fights infection.

4. **Don't smoke or vape.** Smoking and vaping don't just affect the lungs, but can also affect the immune system. People who smoke or vape may have a harder time fighting infections, and if they become infected with COVID-19 could develop more serious illness.

5. **Avoid drinking too much alcohol** – no more than one drink per day for women and two per day for men. Alcohol can lower the immune system's ability to do its job. Some people shouldn't drink at all.

6. **Do what you can to combat stress,** as it may help lower the levels of infection-fighting white blood cells. This is especially important during the uncertainty and worry around the pandemic. Relaxation, deep breathing, meditation and even laughter are all good stress-busters.

7.   **Stay hydrated.** This can help your body carry white blood cells and other germ-fighting cells through your system.

Staying healthy is everyone's top priority these days. Try to trade in your worry or feeling of helplessness by taking immune-boosting steps each and every day. While we can't control the virus and the effects it's having on our lives and the lives of people around the world, we can control our own actions and work to protect our own health. Remember – by keeping yourself healthy, you're helping to keep those around you healthy, too.

*Disclaimer: If you're pregnant, have been physically inactive or have a health condition such as arthritis, diabetes or heart disease, check with your doctor before starting an exercise programme or increasing your activity level. He or she can tell you what types and amounts of activities are safe for you.

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