

**BMA**



# Nutrition Newsletter

“Making your immune system strong is a great way to focus on what you can control during COVID”

-Jessica Murgueytio MS.RD.LD.CDE

## Immune System 101: How Do We Strengthen Our Defenses

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COVID-19 is the biggest public health emergency that we have faced in the last century and the impact will be felt long after we have the virus under control. While vaccine research is underway, many of my patients have reported feeling helpless about being able to do anything more than standard precautions, including wearing a mask, hand hygiene and social distancing, in order to decrease the risk of catching COVID or at least being able to reduce the severity of COVID if they contract it.

Boosting your own immune system will not prevent you from contracting COVID but it can make you a healthier individual, and if you did contract COVID your body would be more able to manage the infection. Here are some easy ways we can increase our defenses and harness the power of our immune systems to make us healthier and stronger.

***TIP#1- Use your extra time wisely: Sleep & exercise.*** The increased time available to use due to reductions in commutes and social events should be used wisely which would



include adding in health practices into our lives which may have been more challenging to do under “normal” circumstances. Both adequate sleep, 7-8 hours each night, and routine exercise, anything from aerobic walking to weight training to sprints on your spin bike, can improve your gut biome which is the foundation of our immune system. Try and accomplish these by thinking about what your schedule will also return to once COVID is gone, meaning start working out in the morning if your evenings are going to be busy when work and school events return. You can also work on improving nighttime rituals, like staying up late watching TV, so you can go to bed earlier and get that quality shut eye. We want to take this added time to be better now, and keep our immune system and ourselves strong when our normal returns

***TIP #2- Check Your Vitamin D!*** Vitamins and minerals are essential to the function and strength of our immune system and help it perform at an optimal level. Vitamin D is one

of those vitamins and it has been discovered that vitamin D deficiency is correlated with the severity of COVID symptoms. I strongly recommend getting your vitamin D levels checked which is completed as part of your routine physical at BMA, and you can access these results on your patient portal. If it is discovered that you are deficient in vitamin D, you will need a supplement in order to correct it. Vitamin D is hard to get from the diet and is only found naturally in dairy and fatty fish. We can get vitamin D from the sun, but we only make about 20% of our daily needs that way. Taking 1000-2000IU of vitamin D every day is a great way to ensure you are getting an adequate intake of this vitamin, however, if you are deficient you may need a much higher dose that will be prescribed by your physician.

**TIP #3- Supplements Can Assist!** Vitamin C gets a lot of attention since it can support your immune health by acting as an antioxidant and to assist the body with managing any histamine response. You can take 1000mg of vitamin C each day and make sure you are getting plenty of foods high in vitamin C like potatoes, bell peppers and citrus fruit. Zinc is a mineral that is also an integral part of various cells in our immune system and is critical to their function. Dietary sources of zinc include seafoods, shellfish, nuts and seeds, grass-fed beef and beans like chickpeas. You can supplement with zinc but do not go above 15mg as you risk blocking



the absorption of other minerals like iron and magnesium.

**Tip #4- BREATHE!** Trust me, I know this is easier said than done during this crazy and stressful time, but stress is a known disrupter of our immune system. Exercise and sleep are both very effective tools to manage stress but if you are doing both and still feel anxious try getting a little more creative with your approach to stress management. Meditation and deep breathing are extremely effective in reducing anxiety and can even bring down blood pressure (another risk factor for the severity of COVID). Try using apps like the Fitbit app, Calm or Head Space to help set five minutes aside to close your eyes and focus on breathing. Get outside and spend some time walking outside; dog walking has been shown to significantly reduce stress and improve cognitive function. Creative activities like coloring, painting and scrapbooking are also helpful in reducing stress. Another tried and true method of stress management is practicing gratitude. I strongly encourage my patients to journal and write out everything including what they are thankful for since putting your thoughts and emotions into words will help you work through them much more efficiently.

Remember, while COVID is extremely intimidating, try your best to focus on each day as it comes. We want to put our efforts and emotions into what we can control and that is our physical and mental health and wellness. We will get through this and if we push ourselves to improve on our nutrition and lifestyle habits, we will hopefully come out healthier and ready to celebrate!

*In Health & Happiness, Jessica Murgueytio  
MS/RD/LD/CDE*