

Infection Protection

One thing we can all agree on is that not getting COVID-19 is better than getting COVID-19. We're familiar with the basic precautions that help us to avoid it: wearing a face covering, maintain at least 6 feet of distance between ourselves and other people that we don't live with, keeping gatherings with others small and outside, and practicing good hand hygiene.

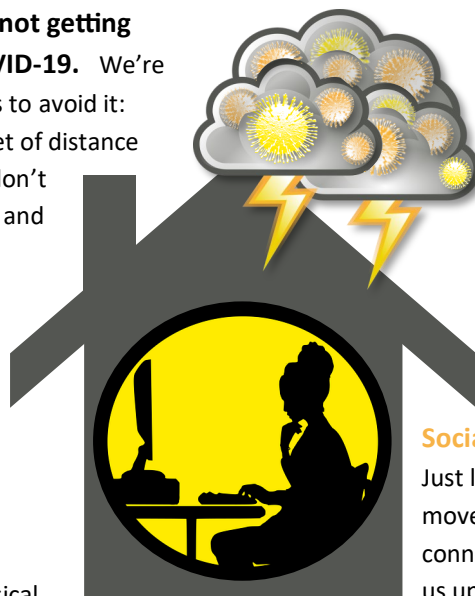
In addition to those life-saving precautions, we have even more tools in our "Infection Protection" toolbox that help keep us safe from whatever infectious storms are raging, whether it's colds, flu, or COVID-19.

Physical Activity

Humans are built to [move](#). Not only does physical activity keep our bones and muscles strong, it also helps keep our immune system in top form! In the short run, exercise can help our immune system identify and eliminate pathogens, and in the long run, regular exercise helps to slow down the age-related weakening of the [immune system](#). Each week, shoot for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity, such as walking, running, cycling, skiing, snowshoeing, dancing, or whatever else makes you happy! This comes out to less than a half-hour of moving around a day. Physical activity not only helps to keep your immune system strong, it can also improve your.....

Sleep

[Getting enough sleep](#) is as critical to good health as eating enough nourishing food and drinking plenty of clean water. While more sleep won't necessarily prevent you from becoming ill, getting too little sleep can negatively affect your immune system, leaving you more susceptible to the germs you encounter. Being sleep deprived decreases the production of proteins that target infection and inflammation. Additionally, research indicates that people who get enough sleep have a more robust response to vaccinations. Getting enough good sleep helps your body ramp up its infection-fighting power. For more information and tips, check out a previous Topic of the Month about [sleep hygiene](#) and getting a good night's rest.



Nutrition

What we eat impacts the functioning of every system of our bodies, including our immune system. A diet that maximizes plant-based foods and minimizes highly-processed foods provides support to your hard-working immune system. You don't have to go hunting for expensive, trendy superfoods to benefit your body. There are lots of "[Humble Heroes](#)" that are tasty, affordable, and nutritious!

Social Support

Just like humans are physical creatures that need to move, we're social creatures that are hard-wired to connect with others. These connections help to "fill us up" and alleviate feelings of stress. Too much stress depresses our bodies' ability to fight off infection. Meaningful, supportive relationships help us to mentally and physically weather life's storms. It's important to get creative and find ways to [create connection](#), even if we're physically apart.

Tobacco & Alcohol: Immune System Saboteurs

During unsettled times, a little relief can seem like a good thing. Sometimes though, that relief can cause more problems and come at the cost of a weakened immune system. [Smoking](#) and [vaping](#) not only damage the lungs, heart, and blood vessels (putting a person at great risk for respiratory infections such as COVID-19), they also weaken a person's immune response, making him/her less able to fight off infections. While there is still limited data on the way that [alcohol consumption](#) impacts how someone responds to COVID-19 in specific, we do know that drinking can worsen the outcomes of other respiratory illness and, in general, impair immune response. Alcohol also interferes with sleep quality, cutting you off from your nightly chance to rest and recharge. But how much is too much? If someone chooses to drink, limiting intake to no more than a couple of drinks a couple of times a week is a good idea. Those at increased risk for COVID-19 should have even less or abstain altogether. If you'd like to talk with someone about how your drug or alcohol use is affecting your life, call and make an appointment with one of our providers at 218-387-2330.

**TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES CAN TAKE A LOT OF SUPPORT. WE'RE HERE TO HELP!
ASK A NURSE OR PROVIDER IF YOU'D LIKE TO TALK.**

Supplemental Insurance?

Part of what increases our anxiety and frustration around the spread of infectious diseases, especially COVID-19, is the feeling of powerlessness. We want to feel strong, protected, and in control. Taking supplements can sometimes make us at least *feel* safer - as if we're swallowing insurance against approaching dangers. Here are some questions to keep in mind if you take, or are thinking about taking, supplements to increase your infection protection.



How can I best give my immune system a “boost?”

It's common to see supplements touted as being able to [super-charge your immune system](#). In reality, you want an immune system that's powerful enough to fight off abnormal cells, bacteria, and viruses, but not running in over-drive and causing allergies, autoimmune disease, or chronic inflammation. Unless your immune system has been knocked back because of illness, surgery, or malnutrition, it doesn't need “boosting.” For the majority of people, a plant-rich, balanced diet will be your best bet to maintain a well-tuned immune system. Avoid the use of single, high-dose micronutrients, unless it's under the supervision of your health-care provider.



But if a little is good, isn't more even better?

Nope - It's possible to have [too much of a good thing](#)! For example, zinc is a mineral that essential for immune functioning, but taking doses that are too high for too long can lead to a deficiency in copper - another nutrient needed for a properly working immune system. Additionally, many studies of supplements are done with isolated cells or lab animals and help researchers learn more about how certain nutrients work, but that's not the same as actually being tested on humans. It's not a good idea to start taking a supplement based only on promising, but incomplete, research.



Are “natural,” “herbal,” or “botanical” products safer and gentler than pharmaceuticals?

The waters can get muddy here, because we have to define what we mean by all those words! What qualifies a supplement as natural, herbal, or botanical? Plant-derived supplements can be extremely potent, and [“safer” is relative](#). For example, vinpocetine is derived from the Vinca minor plant. In the US, it's sold as a botanical ingredient in some memory supplements. It can cause dangerously low blood pressure, and, if taken during pregnancy, it can cause birth defects or miscarriage. A 2015 study estimated that dietary supplements are responsible for over 20,000 visits to the ER annually. Just like the supplements run the spectrum from dangerous to safe, manufacturers run the spectrum from dishonest to responsible. Unfortunately, the burden of figuring out what's a safe product and who's a responsible manufacturer falls to you, the consumer.



How can I be a savvy supplement shopper?

Supplement manufacturers aren't required to demonstrate that their products are safe or effective, they only have to show that they are unadulterated, and they can't claim to cure illnesses. To be savvy, you'll have to do some sleuthing.

Find the answers to these [questions](#):

1. *Has the product triggered any health warning or sanctions?* The [Food and Drug Administration's](#) website is a good place to start. If the supplement is a combination of ingredients, research each one. Consumer Reports has a list of their [“Dirty Dozen”](#) linked to serious adverse effects.
2. *Has the product been tested by independent labs?* To make sure a supplement actually contains what's on the label, make sure it's been 3rd-party verified. Look for the “USP” or “NSF” seal.
3. *Are the results promised too good to be true?* Consider the language used to describe possible outcomes, such as healing a wide variety of health problems, uses scientific-sounding words in misleading ways, or having undocumented testimonials. The Federal Trade Commission has more information about how to spot [supplement fraud](#).
4. *Is there evidence that the supplement actually does what it promises?* Find out in the fact sheets at the [National Institutes of Health](#) (for vitamins and minerals) or the US National Library of Medicine's [Medline Plus](#) (for herbs, drugs, and other supplements.)

If you'd like to know more about ways you can take care of yourself for the most “Infection Protection,” check out our whole [Topic of the Month](#) library!