



How to help your Immune System Fight the Coronavirus

Sheldon Cohen, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, has spent his entire career studying the effect of psychological stress and social support on immunity and susceptibility to infectious disease. His studies and hundreds of other studies like his, have proven that chronic stress lowers our body's ability to fight off viruses and other pathogens that the body might encounter through cuts, scrapes, human contact and simply breathing the air.

Just because we are exposed to a virus, doesn't mean we will get sick. A healthy immune system will fight off the invaders with killer T cell and B cells that can fend off a cold virus, without us ever knowing we had it. Chronic stress weakens our immune system and makes us more vulnerable to these invaders. For various reasons, which we will explain below, stress turns your immune system functioning down. Doctors and researchers call this immunosuppression. Obviously, during this COVID-19 crisis, we want our immune systems to be functioning at peak levels. **Here are five measures that that you can help you do that:**

1) Lower stress. The immune system gets an initial boost during acute (short-lived) episodes of stress. After that initial boost, levels drop. According to stress expert, Dr. Robert Sapolsky of Stanford University: "Sustained major stressors drive immune system function down to 40 to 70% below baseline." When this happens often enough, the immune system can become dysregulated, and no longer functions properly. Lowering stress with simple techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualization (as well as the suggestions below) gives the immune system a respite from stress and can prevent it from becoming dysregulated.

2) Exercise. According to author and Harvard Medical School Professor, John Ratey, M.D., "stress and age depress the immune system, while exercise strengthens it." Right up until I started exercising vigorously on most days, about 15 years ago, I would get three or four really nasty colds a year that would last 4-6 weeks from start to finish. Now I get one cold about every other year and each one lasts a week or two at the most. I attribute this improved immunity to regular exercise. (Keep in mind, this is only anecdotal evidence at best.)

3) Practice Yoga or stretching. The research here is plain and simple: Yoga lowers stress. Stress as we said above compromises your immune system. There are also several studies that show doing yoga about an hour before bed, will help you sleep better.

4) Go to bed early. According to William Dement, M.D., author of the book *The Promise of Sleep*, "Quality of sleep before infection is statistically significant in determining whether someone gets a cold." There's definitely a connection between chronic insomnia and immune system dysfunction.

5) Meditate. Two groups of 25 people got a flu shot. One group had just taken a mindfulness meditation class while the other group had not. The meditators immune system reaction to the flu shot was significantly stronger than the control group who hadn't meditated.

So now you have some ideas for how to attack this problem of COVID-19 from the inside out. Everything we've outlined above, will also help you lower stress. In this way you will have applied a one-two punch to the virus by increasing your immune system functioning and decreasing your stress.

Article courtesy of Jim Porter, President, StressStop — StressStop.com

Your Employee Assistance Program is available to assist you and your family members through this process. We are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your privacy is maintained and your interactions with the EAP are strictly confidential. And we offer our services through Telehealth (phone or video counseling) to keep you and our network of providers safe and healthy!

Employee Assistance of the Pacific

1221 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 730 Honolulu, HI 96814

www.EAPacific.com

Toll-Free (877) 597-8222

(808) 597-8222

