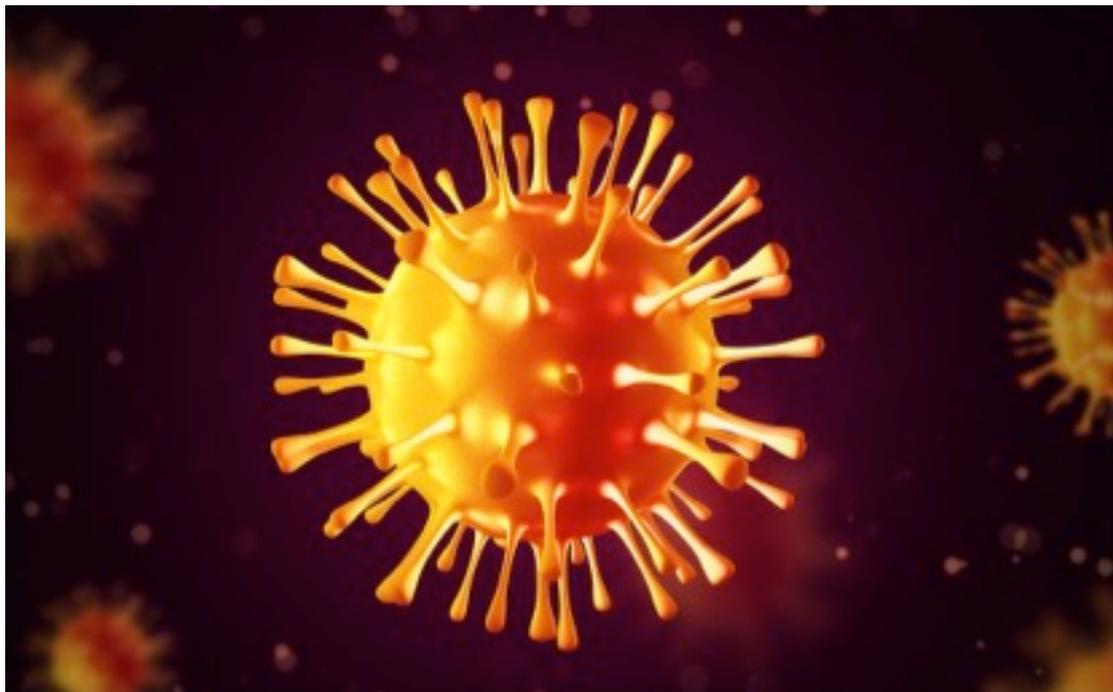


# Obtaining and Maintaining Wellness and Optimal Immune Health during the current COVID-19 Pandemic / Feardemic

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## INTRODUCTION

**SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19**, is a novel pathogen, which means that those who contract it have no existing antibodies to raise a defence. For that reason, it remains imperative to continue practicing social distancing, wearing masks in situations where social distancing is not feasible such as on public transport and while shopping and to practice good hand hygiene, and cough etiquette.



It's also important to keep in mind that a strong immune system will not necessarily prevent you from contracting COVID-19.

However, developing a strong and balanced immune system and promoting health and wellness can sustain your body as it familiarises itself with the new virus in the event that you get sick. Taking steps now to boost your immune health can also help you fight other common bugs such as cold or flu viruses. Eating nutritious foods, getting quality sleep and managing your anxiety and fear regarding the pandemic are meaningful ways to optimise your immune system.

Fear may be worse than the virus for the majority of people as everyone is at risk of contracting this virus. However bear in mind that the majority of people recover from COVID-19 without requiring special treatment.

Sun Si Miao, considered by many to be one of the leading patriarch's of Chinese Medicine, stressed that the first thing to do in treating illness is to

“modify the patients diet and lifestyle and only then, if these do not effect a cure, treat with medicinals and acupuncture.” So the first thing to examine when considering wellness and immune health is your diet.

## IMPORTANCE OF SELF CARE

### A. Nutrition / Diet

Nutrition is a critical component of your immune response. Poor nutrition can deteriorate your immune system whereas quality nutrition can be the foundation for strength. Balanced nutrition, can enhance your ability to resist infections and remain healthy. In addition, modest amounts of each of the following six essential vitamins and minerals will help to keep your body healthy.

Vitamins and Minerals	Dietary Information	Sources
<b>Vitamin A</b>	This fat soluble vitamin helps to regulate the immune system and protects against infections by keeping your tissues and skin healthy. It's also important for normal vision, helps the heart, lungs, kidneys and other organs to function properly.	Liver, Sweet potatoes, carrots, apricots, spinach, broccoli, fish, cantaloupe, squash, eggs, cod liver oil and cheese.
<b>Vitamin C</b>	This essential water soluble vitamin is a powerful antioxidant that can boost the immune system by increasing white cell (lymphocytes and phagocytes) production which help protect the body against infection. It also helps white blood cells function more effectively while protecting them from damage by free radicals. Vitamin C is an essential part of the skin's defence system by acting as an antioxidant and strengthening the skin's barriers. It therefore also helps wound healing. People who have pneumonia tend to have lower Vitamin C levels, and supplements of Vitamin C have been shown to shorten the recovery time.	Oranges, grapefruit, broccoli, brussels sprouts, strawberries, blackcurrants, red bell peppers and tomato juice.
<b>Vitamin D</b>	It's a very important fat soluble vitamin in both the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 as it modulates your T-helper cells and cytokine production. It also promotes T-regulatory cells, which are responsible for anti-infectious action, for suppressing immune responses, and for limiting inflammatory processes. Recent studies have shown that vitamin D deficiency that was not sufficiently treated was associated with an increased risk for COVID-19 infection. As many Irish people have a deficiency in Vitamin D (due to not getting enough sunshine) it is advisable to take Vitamin D supplements in the form of Vitamin D3).	Salmon, sardines, egg yolk, shrimp, mushrooms, fortified milk, fortified cereals, fortified yogurt and breads.
<b>Vitamin E</b>	This fat soluble vitamin is another powerful antioxidant that may help reduce free radical damage and also slow the ageing process of your cells.	Sunflower seeds, dry roasted hazelnuts, almonds and peanuts, green leafy vegetables, butternut squash, mangos, avocados.
<b>Magnesium</b>	Increasing your intake of magnesium is recommended when taking vitamin D supplements as it helps activate vitamin D. All the enzymes that metabolise vitamin D seem to require magnesium. Magnesium activates more than 600 enzymes and influences extracellular calcium levels. It is essential for the stability of cell function, RNA and DNA synthesis, and cell repair, as well as maintaining the antioxidant status of the cell.	Avocados, nuts, legumes, seeds, whole grains, fruits such as prickly pears, passion fruit, guavas, bananas, papaya, blackberries, raspberries, grapefruit and dried figs.

<b>Zinc</b>	This mineral is required for DNA synthesis, helps your immune system, metabolism and growth. It may reduce inflammation and the risk of some age-related diseases. It is important in wound healing and your sense of taste and smell.	Meat (beef, lamb, chicken), shellfish, beans/legumes and nuts/seeds, oats, spinach, asparagus.
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## B. Good Metabolic Health

Although there is no universally accepted definition of metabolic health, it may be characterised as having appropriate levels of blood sugar, triglycerides, high-density lipoproteins (HDL) cholesterol, waist band circumference and blood pressure.

**a) Support your Gut:** By supporting the disease fighting bacteriophages in your gut by eating foods with probiotics, such as Greek yogurt, garlic, turmeric coriander, onion, ginger, seaweed, and fermented foods such as kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut, pickles, miso, tempeh, kimchi, certain cheeses such as cheddar, mozzarella, gruyere, gouda, parmesan and cottage cheese and sourdough bread.

**b) Time Restricted Eating:** (Intermittent fasting) One example of this is to eat breakfast / lunch at 12 noon, and finish dinner by 8pm. Fast until the next day at noon (16 hour fast). Do this every day.

There are numerous health benefits from time restricted eating including improvements in blood pressure, levels of HDL and LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, glucose and insulin resistance. In addition, time restricted eating reduces markers of systemic inflammation and oxidative stress, It obviously helps with weight loss, it reduces inflammation and improves overall metabolic wellbeing and immunity.

**c) Herbs:** Traditionally herbs have been used as natural treatments for various diseases, including viral infections. Herbs commonly used as antivirals include:

- Astragalus or Milkvetch (Huáng Qí)
- Ginger (Shēng Jiāng)
- Sage (Dan Shen)
- Fennel (Xiao Hui Xiang)
- Oregano (Niu Zhi)
- Echinacea (Zi Zhu Hua)
- Garlic (Da Suan)
- Ginseng (Ren Shen)
- Peppermint (See Bo He)
- Basil (Luo Le)
- Rosemary (Mi Die Xiang)
- Lemon Balm (Xing feng Cao)
- Liquorice (Gan Cao)
- Elderberry (Jie Gu Mu)
- Cinnamon (Rou Gui)
- Dandelion (Pu Gong Ying) and Turmeric (Yu Jin)



**d) Hydration:** Keep well hydrated and drink adequate amounts of water and avoid excessive consumption of coffee, sugary drinks and alcohol as it can act as a diuretic and reduce hydration. Avoid alcohol as much as possible as it undermines your immune system and health by depressing immunity and virus resistance. Both Chinese and Ayurvedic Medicine recommend that you sip warm water throughout the day as it keeps your body healthy and hydrated. It also improves digestion, removes toxins, relieves congestion and promotes relaxation.

## **IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL / EMOTIONAL CARE**

### **a) The Feardemic**

The incessant media coverage of the Global Pandemic has created a Global Feardemic. So many things have changed so abruptly. Suddenly everyone in the world is at risk of contracting COVID-19. For many people this is a terrifying prospect. However, it could be argued that the contagion of Fear may be worse than the virus for the majority of people. Bear in mind that 80% of people recover from COVID-19 without requiring special treatment, and for the majority, especially children and young adults, illness due to COVID-19 is generally minor. Many are asymptomatic.

There is a real risk, COVID-19 disproportionately affects older people and people with underlying health conditions. Around 1 in every 5 people who are infected with COVID-19 develop difficulty in breathing and require hospital care. People who are aged over 65 years, and people who have underlying medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, heart disease, hypertension, respiratory disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, moderate to severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, cancer, dementia, obesity, chronic liver and kidney disease are among those who are at greater risk.

Ultimately however, most people will not be severely impacted by COVID-19 and yet, many find themselves obsessing about the virus, engaging with the

news 24/7, clicking on every alert. They are looking for reassurance and certainty, something to allay their fear. But as there is no certainty to be found, this constant reassurance seeking simply creates more fear perpetuating a cycle that may have considerable impact on health and well-being.

## **b) Chronic Fear and Anxiety**

Hundreds of research studies over the past fifty years have demonstrated the relationship between stress (anxiety and fear) and immune system responses. Acute stressful situations, lasting minutes, are associated with a potentially adaptive increase of some parameters of natural immunity and a decrease of some functions of specific immunity. Acute anxiety and fear, tend to suppress cellular immunity while preserving humoral immunity.

Humoral immunity arises from the activity of antibodies directed against foreign agents (antigens) in the tissues or circulating in the blood, whereas cellular immunity works inside infected cells, where it destroys the pathogens or microorganisms by the process of lysis by releasing cytokines. Humoral immunity displays a quick response against pathogens whereas cellular immunity is slower in action.

Chronic anxiety and fear, which is currently a global phenomena, causes suppression of both cellular and humoral immunity — which in turn increases vulnerability to the virus and other pathogens and disease.



Chronic anxiety and fear may also elicit prolonged secretion of cortisol, to which white blood cells mount a counter-regulatory response by down-regulating their cortisol receptors. This in turn reduces the cells capacity to respond to anti-inflammatory signals and allows cytokinins-mediated inflammatory processes to flourish. The so called “Cytokine Storm” in Covid 19 denotes a hyperactive immune response where the levels of released cytokinins are injurious to host cells and is associated with detrimental outcomes.

## **c) Stress Management**

As challenging as this is during this pandemic / feardemic, there are numerous ways to reduce stress and maintain wellbeing, including walking in nature,

playing with a pet, meditation, massage, develop a positive self-talk habit, Yoga, Tai Chi Chuan, practicing gratitude, aromatherapy, relaxing music, escape to a book, enjoy a bath with essential oils and/or epsom salts, engage with something creative / artistic, gardening as a wonderful de-stressor, sing or/and dance. Find what increases your sense of connection to yourself, others and the world around you and practice these activities often as possible.

#### **d) Sleep**

Sleep is one of the most important health behaviours for optimal immune function, mental and physical health, and quality of life. Poor quality of sleep is associated with a higher susceptibility to illness. I would recommend 7 or more hours sleep for adults, 8-10 hours sleep for teens, 9-12 hours sleep for school age children. If you are having difficulties sleeping, try limiting screen time for at least an hour before bed as blue light emitted from your TV, computer, and mobile phone suppresses melatonin and may disrupt your body's natural circadian rhythm (wake-sleep-cycle). Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, energy drinks and chocolate six hours before bedtime. If possible go to bed at the same time every night and sleep in a completely dark room or use a sleep mask.

#### **e) Activity**

Moderate intensity physical activity is associated with better immune function, lower levels of anxiety and perceived stress. Physical activity helps to mobilise your white blood cells by increasing blood flow and it is also a great de-stressor. Regular exercise also reduces chronic inflammation which is important in protecting yourself against disease. It also boosts your T-cells which are responsible for destroying invading pathogens.



## **BRIEF CHINESE MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE**

SARS-CoV-2 the current coronavirus pandemic has spread rapidly to more than 200 countries. It causes a viral pneumonia that is extremely infectious and pathogenic. By establishing an integrative system combining both Chinese medicine and Western medicine, China has achieved good clinical efficacy in the prevention and control of the pandemic.

The advantages of Chinese Medicine in the treatment of COVID-19 include effective relief of symptoms, retarding the development of symptoms from mild and moderate to severe, improvement of cure rate, reducing mortality rates, and promoting effective rehabilitation. The National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China have issued treatment guidelines that provide corresponding herbal prescriptions for patients depending on the stage and severity of their symptoms. Recent studies from hospitals in China support the efficacy of Chinese medicine in providing continuous prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

Chinese medicine has many modalities of healing including Acupuncture, Herbal Medicine, Nutrition & Dietetics, Massage, Tuina, Moxibustion, Cupping, Gua Sha, Aromatherapy, Tai Chi Chuan, Qi Gong, Daoist Meditation (Microcosmic and Macrocosmic Orbit, Zouwang: Sitting and Forgetting).

**ACCM** offers a number of public lectures by the **Daoist Priest - Master Jeffrey C. Yuen** on wellness and healing from a Daoist Healing Arts /Chinese Medicine perspective.

- Macrocosmic Orbit – Da Zhou Tian
- Microcosmic Orbit - Xiao Zhou Tian
- Wuji Qi Gong
- Wellness through the Seasons – living in accordance with the guiding principles of the seasons
- The Six Healing Sounds
- Zouwang: Sitting and Forgetting Meditation
- A Heart-Centred Approach to Wellness
- Empowering the Self to Confront Illness
- All Diseases are Rooted in the Spirit
- Dealing with Emotional Issues
- The Healing Process
- Healing through Daoism An approach based on the early Roots of Daoism/ Shamanism
- What Now? Life after Cancer – staying well after the surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy are over

For further information on these lectures: <https://accm.ie/public-lectures/>