



How To Protect Your Health During a Pandemic

By Alona Pulde, MD and Matthew Lederman, MD
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We are in a unique time, and it's likely that many of you are feeling anxious, scared, and tired, seeking more predictability and security in your life. It makes sense to be afraid when you can't go five minutes without hearing or reading words like "coronavirus," "quarantine," "death counts rising," "flatten the curve," or "social distancing." When we feel fear and uncertainty it is natural to try to gain control wherever we can. Sure, we can stay at home and do our part to be law-abiding citizens following the latest regulations of our local governments, but beyond that, what can we do to foster a greater sense of safety and security in our individual lives and the lives of our families?

5 Key Components of Optimal Health

At [Kinectin.com](https://kinectin.com), we developed the "Hands of Joy" model for optimizing health and well-being, composed of your internal world, or left hand, interwoven with your external world, or right hand.

We label the five fingers of your left hand S.N.A.P.S., which stands for Sleep, Nutrition, Activity, Play, and Soul. By optimizing each of these fingers of your internal world you will be more resourced to do everything that is important to you, including fighting viruses. So, if you are wondering what you can do right now to optimize your immune system, focus on these five areas.

- **SLEEP:** Ensure that you get sufficient sleep to feel rested (for most that is 8 hours).
- **NUTRITION:** Eat as many whole plant foods as possible (to both optimize nutrient content and minimize toxic burden).
- **ACTIVITY:** Get your body moving by engaging in moderate daily activity (everything from taking walks to following online exercise videos).
- **PLAY:** Engage in play (that is, content-free time) regularly—not only with your family and friends, but also by finding your own fun and creative outlets. It's hard to stimulate stress chemical-inducing anxiety during play.
- **SOUL:** Take daily measures (e.g., meditation or other self-regulating techniques) to get your body out of survival mode to enjoy life rather than just

get through it.

This simple framework ensures that your body will be primed for action when needed. Additionally, all five of these areas of internal health play an important role in helping to rid your body of excess immune-system-suppressing stress chemicals such as adrenaline and cortisol.

As you can see, there is quite a bit involved in your internal world, so it is helpful to explore this in parts. For the remainder of this article we are going to focus on nutrition and how proper nutrition can significantly increase the odds of remaining healthy through this pandemic.

Have Healthy Comfort Food Ready to Go

The first thing to remember is we all have needs for ease, comfort, and relief that are particularly triggered in times like this. For many, that can mean turning to highly processed junk foods. So, let's be aware of that and then take steps to set ourselves up for success by having whole plant foods on hand that are both tasty and ready to enjoy.

While we love leafy greens, don't limit yourself to just salads: Have more calorically dense dishes, like mashed potatoes and whole grain baked ziti, available at a moment's notice. (You can find many delicious options and recipes [right here](#).) We like to freeze large batches of these [comfort foods](#) so that we can pop them in the microwave or toaster oven whenever the need arises. Make your list of comfort foods and prepare large batches to eat both now and later.

Liberate Your Naturally Robust Immune System

It's important to remember that whole plant-based foods are optimal fuel for your body in general which therefore makes them optimal fuel for your immune system. We like to think of your immune system as an exceptional virus fighter that is extremely effective at

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baseline, when your body is functioning optimally. When we are stressed (stuck in survival mode), anxious (living with little play in our lives), inactive (getting little exercise, sunlight, and vitamin D), exhausted (from not sleeping well), and malnourished (eating lots of added sugar, added fats, processed foods, and animal products), then we impair our normally robust immune system along with all of the other organ systems in our body. So, it is not that we have weak immune systems that need to be bolstered; rather, we have robust immune systems that need to be liberated from the “added weight.”

A helpful analogy is to think of a marathon runner who is given a 40-pound weight vest to wear while he runs. How well is he going to run with that vest? Does he need more supplements to run better? No, he needs to remove the weighted vest and release the robust athlete underneath. Similarly, our immune system can be weighed down by our diet and lifestyle, and rather than adding supplements, we need to remove that burden. That is where the healthy diet and lifestyle come in (aka S.N.A.P.S.).

Reverse Chronic Diseases that May Increase Mortality with COVID-19

It appears that people with [heart disease](#) and [diabetes](#) are at higher risk of mortality when fighting COVID-19 (and many other infections). What seems to increase mortality is when their body is unable to take the stress of fighting the virus. For example, the lungs and/or heart fail under the stress of illness (people with existing lung or heart disease are at higher risk of this) or the body gets a secondary infection on top of the viral infection (diabetics are at higher risk of this). Whole food, plant-based diets are known to slow, halt, and, in many cases, even reverse these high-risk conditions. Therefore, we can't think of a better time than now to make changes that will get your key organs into fighting shape!

The bottom line is that your body is naturally a fantastic virus fighter—when given the proper fuel, care, and environment that allow it to function optimally. So, do yourself (and all of those people who want you to be around for a long, long time) a favor: Act now to remove that standard American diet weight vest, and prepare your heart, lungs, blood sugar, and the rest of your body to handle not only COVID-19 but anything else that Mother Nature throws at you in the future!