MYTH BUSTING: Can vitamins and supplements cure COVID-19?

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Dr Seranne Motilal answers questions about vitamins and minerals supplements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Can vitamin and mineral supplements cure COVID-19?**

No supplement has been shown to prevent or cure COVID-19.

While micronutrients, such as vitamins D and C and zinc, are critical for a well-functioning immune system, there is currently no guidance on the use of micronutrient supplements as a treatment of COVID-19. If you have COVID-19, you should discuss any supplements or other treatments with a healthcare provider.

Can vitamin and mineral supplements help keep me healthy in COVID-19?

While there are currently many studies underway to determine the effectiveness of supplements in COVID-19, the greatest benefit is likely for those who have a deficiency. Deficiencies in certain micronutrients, such as vitamin C or zinc, could hamper the immune system and addressing these by taking a supplement can be beneficial. But consuming higher doses than your body needs will not provide additional protection - and can in fact be harmful.

Many different nutrients are involved in the normal functioning of the immune system - if you do not have a deficiency, instead of taking a single supplement, your best bet is to eat a variety of healthy, whole foods each day, including plenty of colourful fruits and vegetables, along with other healthy behaviours such as regular physical activity, not smoking, getting adequate sleep, and managing stress to support your immune system.

If you are considering supplementation, speak to a doctor or dietitian and don't exceed recommended daily amounts.

I'm taking a 1000mg of Vitamin C daily, will I be safe from COVID-19?

Although Vitamin C is important for immune function, taking a Vitamin C supplement has not been proven to protect against COVID-19 and does not mean you are not susceptible because the virus can spread from contact between people. Only preventative behaviours at this stage - handwashing, social distancing and wearing masks - can help avoid the virus.

Is Vitamin D supplementation necessary?

While some [studies](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landia/article/PIIS2213-8587(21)00003-6/fulltext) have found a link between low Vitamin D levels and COVID-19, further research is needed to determine what role, if any, vitamin D and vitamin D deficiency might play. At this stage there is not enough evidence to recommend the use of vitamin D supplements to prevent or treat COVID-19.

Our bodies produce Vitamin D when our skin is exposed to direct sunlight, meaning Vitamin D deficiencies are less of a problem in sunny countries. Ensuring that you spend some time outside should be enough to maintain healthy levels but be aware that spending too much time in the sun can lead to skin cancer. Vitamin D is naturally present in many foods - oily fish such as trout, salmon, tuna, and mackerel are good sources - but you can also include fortified foods in your diet.

If you are concerned about your Vitamin D level, you can ask your doctor about getting it checked and whether a supplement might be right for you.

Can herbal supplements or alternative remedies help avoid COVID-19?

Some purported alternative remedies to prevent or treat COVID-19 include herbal therapies, teas, essential oils, tinctures, and silver products such as colloidal silver. There is no scientific evidence that any of these alternative remedies can prevent or cure COVID-19. In fact, some may be unsafe.

It's important to understand that although herbal supplements may come from natural sources, "natural" does not always mean safe or better for your health.

Will eating garlic, ginger or taking a supplement protect me against COVID-19?

Garlic and ginger are healthy foods and may have antimicrobial properties, but there is no evidence that eating these protects against COVID-19 infection.

I am inhaling steam with eucalyptus oil, will this kill the virus if it is in my nasal passages?

While steaming with herbal oils can soothe the symptoms of respiratory and nasal infection, the nature of the coronavirus is that it attaches to cell tissue, which means that steaming cannot reach the virus. Also, be wary of burns related to steaming, especially in children.

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/in-the-news-coronavirus-and-alternative-treatments>

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/can-vitamins-help-protect-against-covid-19/>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>