

COVID-19, Flu, and the Common Cold October 2023



Mary and Tom reminding Dr. Hassell that he can step up his immunity with a brisk walk!

Choose a robust immune system: vigorous, vigilant and victorious viral vanquishers

As you may have noticed when you looked at the calendar, COVID, flu and the common cold season is here. So don't just sit there – slap those viruses down with a well-tuned immune system: Feed your immune system well, slim it down, take it for a walk every day, and tuck it into bed at night for a good sleep. And not only will you have a better viral defense, you'll reduce your risk for most future physical and mental maladies while you are at it. We call that a win-win-win!

How much difference do good lifestyle choices make? Glad you asked. Obesity, being sedentary and smoking, are associated with 4.4x higher risk of serious COVID-19 illness compared to good lifestyle choices.ⁱ

Your lifestyle immune defense strategies

- Go for a 30 minute walk outside every day; **exercise** is an immune system modulator, lowering the incidence, intensity and mortality in viral infections.ⁱⁱ
- **Eat a whole food Mediterranean-style diet**, include vegetables and whole fruit with every meal and snack.^{iii, iv} Include traditional healthy fats, like extra-virgin olive oil and cultured dairy.
- **Include whole foods with probiotics** (“good bugs”). This includes plain yogurt and kefir (flavor them yourself!), **salt cured** sauerkraut such as the *Bubbies* brand. Also, whole foods prepared at home can be sources of probiotics.
- **Choose high-quality protein**: oil-rich fish (like salmon, tuna, and sardines) and red meat (as a source of iron, zinc, and B12) a couple of times a week, each.
- **Avoid sugars and refined grains** like, ahem, the plague. (This includes white rice, white flour, ready-to-eat breakfast cereal, etc.) However, *whole* grains are associated with *less* infectious disease and lower total death rates.^{v,vi}
- **Minimize highly processed foods**, best thought of as those ready-to-eat foods made outside the home, including those “healthy” looking ready-to-eat cereals and meal replacement bars. For reasons that are not clear, the increased consumption of these foods is associated with worse health overall, and more COVID-19 infection in particular.^{vii}
- Get 7–9 hours of **sleep** each day – it is an essential nutrient our bodies can't store that improves our immunity.^{viii}
- Rein in your **waistline!** Reverse **type 2 diabetes!** Overweight and associated risk factors such as diabetes and high blood pressure remain among the most significant reversible risk factors for serious illness and death attributable to COVID-19.^{ix} Read the [Evidence-based Guide to Successful Waist Loss and Preventing or Reversing Insulin Resistance and Type 2 Diabetes](#) handout on the [resources](#) tab at goodfoodgreatmedicine.com; and we also have a new Diabetes Reversal Module at GreatMed.org.
- New COVID **vaccines** are currently in development; stay tuned. It also makes sense to stay home when you are sick and remember to wash your hands, as we have historically done.

- There are a few **nutritional supplements** that might help, and we discuss some of these in our [Cold, Flu and Sinusitis](#) handout at [goodfoodgreatmedicine.com](#) (under the *resources* tab). A useful supplement is cod liver oil (about 1 tablespoon a day) as a source of omega-3 fats, vitamin D, and vitamin A.
- And if you have a cough, our **Hot Lemon and Honey Soother** can offer relief and comfort (see recipe following). Even honey, by itself, anywhere from ½ teaspoon to 2 teaspoons, seemed to work as well or better than cough syrups for cough in children age 2 to 18.^x

Dariush Mozaffarian MD said: "It is a sad fact that (COVID-19 has killed millions), and tens of millions hospitalized worldwide, and we haven't addressed one of the major ways of preventing such severe outcomes.^{xi} We are closing businesses and stopping people from seeing their loved ones, but we are not telling them to lose weight and do some exercise. We should be focusing public health messages on reducing diabetes and obesity as a means to reducing severe COVID disease."^{xii}

And in other news. . .

Eggs are still looking good for heart health!

For a food that has been commonly eaten for the entire recorded history of humankind, eggs remain remarkably controversial. Although eggs are rich in high quality protein, vitamins, minerals and carotenoids, their saturated fat and cholesterol content has been a source of confusion as to whether they contribute to heart disease. Page 46 of our book *Good Food, Great Medicine* (4th edition) gives a fairly thorough review of the effect of eggs on health, and a recent study is of particular interest: investigators looked at egg consumption in relation to cardiovascular disease risk over a 10 year period, and found that **moderate egg consumption (2-7 per week, depending on other factors) was associated with dramatically less heart and vascular disease.** (Higher consumption also showed benefit.)^{xiii}

Listen to the *Food as Medicine* Podcast!

What does it mean to think of food as medicine? Spend 56 minutes listening to Dr. Hassell, chef Josh Galliano, and Seán Collins, Providence *Hear Me Now* podcast host, as they discuss how overweight and obesity are directly tied to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, joint disorders, erectile dysfunction, high blood pressure, stroke, and contribute to dementia and some cancers. When you're ready to take action, read the meal planning excerpts from *Good Food, Great Medicine* posted on the podcast episode <https://bit.ly/hmnp-072>, and put the principles to work in the kitchen!

- Meal planning tips
- Pantry Basics (Shopping list)
- Risk Reduction Action Plan (Start with your pantry)
- Risk Reduction Action Plan (Secret weapon: Protein + Good Fat + Fiber)

Hot Lemon and Honey Soother

Some patients enjoy up to four hours of relief from coughing or sore throat with this tonic.

- Wash and thinly slice one fresh lemon, including peel.
- Place slices in a jug or thermos and add 4 cups of boiling water.
- Add 4 tablespoons (¼ cup) of honey and stir until honey is dissolved. (It may taste too sweet, but the honey has an important role in the soothing.)

Keep the Soother in a thermos and sip as needed. The peel contributes a slightly bitter taste but that is part of the therapeutic benefit. (The longer the mixture sits, the more the bitter taste from the peel will intensify.)

Note: If you don't have access to any lemons, ½ cup apple cider vinegar makes a fine substitute

Speaking events and classes

10/6/23 Geriatric Patient Management Conference:

Miles Hassell MD: Aging Gracefully (A "How To" Presentation) Everett, Washington. <https://bit.ly/3sSDKil>

Sign up for this free monthly medical + lifestyle newsletter at [Goodfoodgreatmedicine.com](#)

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV)

ⁱ Hamer, M. et al. Lifestyle risk factors, inflammatory mechanisms, and Covid 19 hospitalization. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 2020; 87:184-7

ⁱⁱ Da Silveira, M. P. et al. physical exercise as a tool to help the immune system against COVID-19. *Clin and Exp Med* 2021; 21:15-28

ⁱⁱⁱ Casas, R. et al. *Endocr Metab Immune Disord Drug Targets* 2014 Sep 22 *The Immune Protective Effect of the Mediterranean Diet against Chronic Low-Grade Inflammatory Diseases*

^{iv} Merino, J. et al. diet quality and risk in severity of COVID 19. *GUT* 2021

^v Park, Y. et al. *Arch Intern Med* 2011;171:1061-8

^{vi} Li, S. et al. *BMJ* 2014;348:g2659

^{vii} Zhou, L. et al. impact of ultra-processed food intake on the risk of Covid 19 *European Journal of nutrition* 2023; 62:275-87

^{viii} Richter, K. et al. Sleep quality & COVID-19 outcomes *EPMA J.* 2021;12:221-41

^{ix} O'Hearn, M. et al. Covid 19 hospitalizations attributable to cardiometabolic conditions. *JAMA* 2021;10

^x Paul, I. et al. Effect of Honey, Dextromethorphan, or no treatment on nocturnal cough *Arch Ped Adol Med* 2007;161:1140-6

^{xi} Medscape Medical News 2/25/2021

^{xii} O'Hearn, M. et al. *J Am Heart Assoc* 2021 Feb 25;e019259. doi: 10.1161/JAHA.120.019259

^{xiii} Kouvari, M. et al. *ATTICA. Nutrients* 2022;14:5291