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TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

ALTHOUGH there is no cure or specific treatment for COVID-19, there are some things you can do to strengthen your immune system against the coronavirus.

Here are scientifically supported ways to help fight off illness:

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

The amount of sleep you're getting each night can make a big difference in your body's ability to fight infection, health experts say.

One 2015 study found that people who sleep less than six hours each night were more likely to catch a cold than those who slept seven or more.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults sleep at least seven hours each night. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, sleeping in rooms without electronics or screens, and avoiding large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bed are ways to improve your sleep.

EXERCISE REGULARLY

Research shows that regular, moderate exercise can reduce inflammation and support your immune system's cells.

Health experts recommend moderate exercise at least 150 minutes each week, or about 20 minutes a day. You can also do 75 minutes of more intense exercise a week, or do a combination of both.

Moderate exercise includes brisk walking, biking, swimming or jogging, while more intense exercise includes running or other cardio.

But due to precautionary measure its better to exercise at home by keeping social distance.

DRINK PLENTY OF WATER

Staying hydrated isn't directly connected to preventing disease, but it can help with your overall health.

Healthline says you should drink enough water each day to make your urine a pale yellow, while other health experts recommend drinking eight glasses of water a day, or about half a gallon.

MANAGE YOUR STRESS

In this age of uncertainty, lowering your stress level is easier said than done. But health experts say high stress levels have negative impacts on your body's ability to fight off illness.

A series of studies in the 1990s led by Sheldon Cohen, a professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University, found that people who reported higher levels of stress were more susceptible to the common cold.

Cohen led another study published in 2012 that found psychological stress can cause the body to lose its ability to regulate its inflammatory response, which may promote the onset and progression of some diseases.

Health experts recommend stress management techniques such as avoiding social media, meditating, practicing controlled breathing, doing yoga, or other activities that help you feel relaxed.

EAT PLENTY OF FRUITS, VEGETABLES & OTHER HEALTHY FOODS

No one food will prevent infection, but following basic dietary guidelines, like eating plenty of fruit, vegetables and protein is a good start.

There are several specific items you can add to your diet to strengthen your immune system and overall health.

Health experts recommend eating certain foods that are high in vitamin C, like red bell peppers, broccoli,

Here are the best ways to strengthen your immune system during the coronavirus pandemic



However, there is some evidence that regularly taking certain supplements can reduce the duration of certain illnesses.

One 2013 study found that regularly taking vitamin C reduced the duration of colds in adults by 8% and in children by 14%. A similar 2017 study found that the duration of colds among people taking more than 75 mg of zinc per day was 33% shorter than those who didn't take zinc.

An exception to the supplement rule that most health experts agree on is vitamin D, which helps your body fight off infection. You can get vitamin D naturally through certain foods, like salmon, or through exposing your body to sunlight. Some health experts recommend taking a vitamin D supplement during winter months, when sunlight is harder to come by.

If you're going to take supplements, it's important not to take too many. Some health and wellness influencers and YouTubers have recommended taking extremely high doses of supplements in recent weeks in response to COVID-19. But health experts warn that can be dangerous. Taking high doses can cause dizziness, nausea and headaches and damage your organs in more serious cases.

Healthline recommends taking supplements that have been tested by a third party, such as United States Pharmacopeia, NSF International, and ConsumerLab, because supplements aren't regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration.

IMMUNE-STRENGTHENING HABITS ARE NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR OTHER DISEASE PREVENTION MEASURES

Practicing habits to strengthen your health does not mean you should stop following other public health guidelines. You should still be social distancing, avoiding nonessential errands, washing your hands often, wearing a face mask in public and following stay-at-home orders, health experts say.

strawberries, spinach, and citrus fruits like oranges, lemons and grapefruit. Sunflower seeds and almonds are recommended because they are high in vitamin E, while other foods, like yogurt, garlic, poultry and chickpeas, have other health benefits.

Ginger, turmeric, green tea, papayas, kiwis, shellfish and mushrooms are also good items to add to your diet, health experts say.

BE CAREFUL ABOUT TAKING SUPPLEMENTS

Health experts have differing opinions on the use of vitamin and other supplements. They can be pricey, and they don't prevent anyone from catching a disease, no matter how much you take.

Health experts say other disease prevention methods, like frequent hand-washing, is going to help you more than any supplement will.

Expert alert: When you can't cough — extra COVID-19 precautions for people with physical disabilities

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PEOPLE with conditions such as spinal cord injury, Lou Gehrig's disease and multiple sclerosis are at risk of developing severe respiratory problems related to COVID-19 because the muscles that help them breathe already may not function normally.

"When you have a condition that causes paralysis, or weakens muscles in the chest, abdomen or diaphragm, you may not be able to remove lung secretions by coughing," says Kristin Garlanger, D.O., a Mayo Clinic physiatrist. "You may have difficulty inhaling and filling the lungs with oxygen that is carried to the rest of the body."

"If you have a physical disability, now is the time to take extra precautions to protect yourself from this dangerous virus."

Be proactive to prevent illness, Dr. Garlanger says:

- Stay hydrated to keep lung secretions thin.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet to boost the immune system.
- Perform deep breathing and "coughing exercises," which are controlled coughing maneuvers that help clear lungs.
- Change position frequently, using gravity to help clear lungs.

To protect yourself and others from COVID-19, everyone needs to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines:

- Wash your hands.
- Practice social distancing.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Stay home when sick.

But people with physical disabilities are encouraged to take extra safety measures, says Lisa Beck, a Mayo Clinic advanced-practice provider in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

"When CDC guidelines talk about keeping at least 6 feet from another person, that's especially important if you use a wheelchair," Beck says. "Your head is lower than people who are standing, so you may be more vulnerable to respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. Droplets drop."

Dr. Garlanger and Beck offer tips regarding wheelchair use, caregiver plans and respiratory devices:

WHEELCHAIR USERS

- Wheelchair users should consider these tips:
- Keep at least 6 feet from others, when possible.
 - Wash your face, in addition to your hands, after being in public and after having in-person conversations.
 - Use an antibacterial solution to clean high-touch surfaces, such as wheels, brakes

and push rims of a manual wheelchair chair, throughout the day. For a power wheelchair, use an antibacterial solution to clean the joystick, and any other controls, armrests, tray or any parts your hands touch.

"If you use other assistive devices, like walkers or canes, be sure to regularly wipe those with antibacterial products too," Beck says.

PEOPLE WITH CAREGIVERS

People with caregivers should consider these tips:

- Ask caregivers to wear a mask when they enter and work with you in your home.
- Have caregivers wash their hands when they arrive and each time before touching you.
- Ask caregivers to be vigilant about not touching their face or yours.
- Have caregivers check their temperature before arrival.

Ask caregivers not to come to your house if they are not well, including symptoms such as a cough or temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, or if they have a known exposure to someone who is sick.

"Finding appropriate caregivers for your personal or your pet's needs can be difficult to coordinate, but it is so crucial to plan ahead to find someone who can help if your caregiver gets sick or isn't able to assist you," Beck says.

- If your usual caregiver is unavailable:
- Plan on backup caregivers and prepare anyone you may need to rely on in an emergency.
 - Ensure you can get assistance if a caregiver does not show up.
 - Identify people to assist with groceries or

have meals delivered to your home.

- Identify a way to get medications and other supplies in a timely manner.
- Remember pet needs, too. Ensure plenty of food and arrange a backup caregiver for your service animal or pet.

"Some people with disabilities rely on ventilators every day," Beck says. "Making sure caregivers follow strict guidelines to clean and use these machines will help protect those who are vulnerable to respiratory illnesses."

USERS OF VENTILATORS OR OTHER RESPIRATORY ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Users of ventilators or other respiratory assistive devices should consider these tips:

- Clean and disinfect medical equipment according to the manufacturer's instruction.
- Change filters, as suggested by the manufacturer's instructions.
- Wash hands before and after working with the ventilator or the person.
- Make sure caregivers wear a mask or eye shield if they are suctioning secretions.
- Self-assessment tool and resources

Mayo Clinic offers a COVID-19 self-assessment tool to help people assess symptoms. The tool also offers guidance on when to seek medical care and what to do in the meantime.

"If you do become sick and need medical attention, make sure you or your caregivers mention your disability and how it affects your respiratory system when you reach out to medical providers or emergency responders," Dr. Garlanger says. "They will be better prepared to help you." 3

