

Is there a chance your COVID-19 quick fix will work? 'The answer is no'

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This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (yellow)—also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19—isolated from a patient, emerging from the surface of cells (blue/pink) cultured in the lab. Credit: NIAID-RML

Guidance from the federal government is straightforward: The best way

to protect yourself from COVID-19 is to [avoid being exposed](#) to the coronavirus. That guidance includes advice on how to disinfect your home, protect and stay away from others, and [wash your hands](#).

What it doesn't include are any magic formulas, miracle cures, mom-knows-best remedies or "as-seen-on-TV" quick fixes.

Yet with [traditional medicines](#) and vaccines only beginning to undergo testing, surely there are some proven [alternative treatments](#), maybe a vitamin supplement or a superfood, that will prevent or cure sickness from COVID-19—right?

"This could be a very short story," said Dr. Anne Thorndike, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and physician at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. "The answer is no."

Some so-called remedies already have done great harm. Scores of people in Iran died and hundreds were hospitalized after drinking a toxic alcohol based on a rumor of a [coronavirus](#) cure. And a bleaching substance promoted through social media for the coronavirus and other ailments is cited in cases of severe vomiting and diarrhea, dangerously low blood pressure and acute liver failure.

The Food and Drug Administration has sent more than two dozen warning letters to companies about unapproved or deceptive COVID-19 health claims related to various herbal, homeopathic, essential oil and other products. There are currently no vaccines to prevent COVID-19, drugs to treat the infection, or home test kits for the virus, the FDA says, although the agency is working with manufacturers to develop these as soon as possible.

Among the advice the FDA gives consumers: You can't test yourself for COVID-19. Testimonials are no substitute for scientific evidence. And

if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Odds are long that any single food or nutrient will be found to work magic against the coronavirus, said Cheryl Anderson, professor and interim chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Public Health at the University of California, San Diego. "There are very few things you can tease apart from a [healthy diet](#). This idea that somebody's going to take an agent in pill form or in high dose and make everything better, it just hasn't borne out."

Still, the quest for a quick COVID-19 fix isn't surprising, said Thorndike. "People are afraid of this. It's scary to conceptualize that there's an infection out there that we can't treat and that people are dying from."

What people can do is shore up their own foundation with healthy habits. That means excellent personal hygiene, which would include a lot of hand-washing; exercising; not using tobacco; practicing healthy sleep habits; managing stress; and finding social support.

"[Keeping that foundation strong](#) is likely to be better than any advertised agent that is not tested or regulated," said Anderson, director of UCSD's Center of Excellence in Health Behavior and Equity.

To minimize shopping trips under stay-at-home orders, Thorndike suggests looking for vegetables like cabbage, sweet potatoes, squashes and carrots that don't spoil quickly. Frozen vegetables and flash-frozen fruits without added sauces or sugars are equally healthy. It's also easy to stock up on and freeze chicken and fish.

Even canned vegetables, especially with reduced sodium, are more healthful than highly processed, low-nutrient fare, said Anderson, chair of the American Heart Association's nutrition committee. And dried

beans and lentils provide ample fiber and nutrients. "I've noticed they're still on the shelves, they stretch, they go a long way."

It's especially important for people with chronic conditions to stay physically active amid stay-at-home orders. People with diabetes should exercise at least as much every day as before the COVID-19 shutdown, said Thorndike, director of the Metabolic Syndrome Clinic at Massachusetts General. Regular exercise likewise will help control weight and high blood pressure.

Also, no one should take drugs like hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine without medical supervision, Thorndike said. In April, the American College of Cardiology, the Heart Rhythm Society and AHA [issued a warning about potentially life-threatening complications](#) from these drug for heart patients.

People with questions about a treatment or test they heard about online should talk to their doctor, the FDA says. Questions about specific medications should be directed to local pharmacists or to the FDA itself (contact its [Division of Drug Information](#) at druginfo@fda.hhs.gov or 855-543-3784).

No matter how healthy, anyone can be vulnerable to getting COVID-19, said Thorndike. "But the point about a healthy lifestyle is if you were exposed to the virus, it would help you weather whatever sickness you got as best as you could."

Self-care is crucial right now, when stress levels are high, Anderson said. Instead of viewing the pandemic's stay-at-home period as awful, she urges people to commit to their health and to try new things.

"Think about this as a time where you can set new, positive directions."

Provided by American Heart Association

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