

# Expert offers advice for looking after your immune system during COVID-19

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Dr. Glen Davison, a Nutrition and Exercise Immunology expert at the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, has addressed some questions regarding how exercise and nutrition affect the immune system. He has

related this to COVID-19 and provided some recommendations for exercising during lockdown.

## **How does exercise influence the immune system?**

"Being physically active has many benefits including enhanced anti-inflammatory status, and a reduction in many lifestyle-related risk factors for chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Research has shown that some [negative health effects](#) can begin to emerge after even a few days of inactivity (for example, research has shown that after only three days of inactivity blood glucose control was reduced in healthy people). So, if you are stuck in 'lockdown' it is really important to keep active. We also know that [regular physical activity](#) is associated with enhanced immune health and reduced illness risk. Exercise can also have [beneficial effects](#) on general wellbeing, mood and psychological state. It can reduce stress, improve sleep and more. All of these factors have beneficial effects on immunity."

## **Does nutrition play a role?**

"We know that [nutritional deficiencies](#) have negative effects on immune function, so we should always aim to have a healthy and balanced diet in order to achieve this. This also allows us to get the best out of our exercise."

## **Can exercise and good nutrition reduce the risk of being infected with COVID-19?**

"I would say no. We do not know enough about this virus at present to fully understand all of the interactions, but the biggest risk is certainly exposure (hence the current social distancing guidelines we are seeing

around the world). If you are exposed sufficiently, you will almost certainly become infected. Evidence for other respiratory infections, such as influenza and common cold viruses, would support the idea that low levels of activity and poor [nutrition](#) will have negative effects (i.e. it may take longer to clear infections). Therefore, it would be sensible to maintain a healthy and balanced diet and follow general physical activity guidelines. This is unlikely to be a 'miracle cure' that would prevent infection from something like COVID-19, but at the very least, it will contribute to general health and wellbeing and reduce the risks of a variety of other illnesses."

Dr. Davison's expert advice for exercise and nutrition during lockdown are:

1. Try to stay motivated and exercise every day if possible (or at least a few times per week). If you cannot [exercise](#) on some days, try to at least break up your sedentary/sitting time on these less active days—even if this just means getting up and strolling around the room a few times.
2. Struggling for motivation? Why not arrange a video call with your friends and work out together—this is a great way to increase motivation and also socialize.
3. All types of physical activity are beneficial, from walking to running and cycling, from gardening to clearing out the garage.
4. If you are exercising outside do make sure that you maintain safe social distancing in accordance with the current guidelines in your area/country. Remember the greatest risk is exposure, and this is the reason for these rules.
5. Avoid the temptation to overdo it or increase the amount you are doing too quickly, especially if you are trying something new. This could increase your risk of injury, which then prevents you being as active. Start low and progress gradually.
6. Ensure a healthy and balanced diet, to avoid any nutritional

deficiencies and get your nutrients from food as much as possible. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables daily—try to eat a variety of different ones, of various different colors.

7. Avoid drinking too much alcohol—this can have [negative effects](#) on immunity and resistance to infections. Moderation is key!

Provided by University of Kent

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