

How to best protect your immune system

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This spring, many people may be getting sick because of COVID-19 or with something else for the first time since the pandemic began. Dr. Prathit Kulkarni, assistant professor of medicine in infectious diseases at Baylor College of Medicine, shares tips for optimizing your immune system for staying as healthy as possible.

Tip 1: Hand sanitizer was great before the pandemic and is still great

According to Kulkarni, frequently using [hand sanitizer](#) won't decrease your body's ability to fight off germs over time. Although [overuse of antibiotics](#) has been shown to increase [antibiotic resistance](#), the same principle does not apply to hand sanitizer.

"As doctors, we have to use hand sanitizer before and after entering every patient's hospital room," Kulkarni said. "This high frequency of use doesn't make us more susceptible to infections."

However, hand sanitizer should not be considered a substitute for washing your hands thoroughly with soap and water in all situations. There are some viruses that can't be killed with alcohol-based hand sanitizer, such as norovirus. In addition, frequent use of hand sanitizer can dry out the skin, so consider adding moisturizer to your routine.

Tip 2: Overall well-being contributes to a healthy immune system

Healthy habits, like eating well, getting enough sleep and exercising regularly, are good for your overall well-being, which can impact your [immune system](#) and ability to fight off infections, according to Kulkarni. It's important to set yourself up for [good health](#) by supporting your physical and mental well-being.

"It's all part of an overall continuum of health," Kulkarni said. "Getting one night of bad sleep won't make you sick but getting poor sleep over a long period of time can impact your overall health."

Tip 3: There's no magic fix to boost your immune

system

Unfortunately, there's no magic pill or supplement to help protect you from illnesses like the common cold. Although vitamin C and zinc are frequently advertised to boost the immune system, research shows mixed results in effectiveness, Kulkarni said. Studies show that vitamin C, for example, does not prevent someone from getting the common cold, but might provide a minor reduction in symptom duration if taken regularly.

In the case of COVID-19, Kulkarni stresses that the most effective and best-proven way to protect yourself is to get vaccinated and boosted. While vaccines may not entirely prevent you from getting COVID-19, they remain extremely effective at preventing severe disease and hospitalization.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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