

Taking lessons from 1918 flu pandemic, new article shows that plant-based diets reduce risks of severe COVID-19

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Plant-based diets support immunity, which may decrease the risk of severe COVID-19 infection, according to a new article by researchers at

the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and published today by the *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. The article explores lessons learned from the H1N1 influenza outbreak of 1918.

"In looking for solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic, we found important lessons in the H1N1 influenza pandemic of 1918–1919," reports Hana Kahleova, MD, Ph.D., director of clinical research at the Physicians Committee and author of the article. "During that pandemic, the best outcomes were reported by a Seventh-day Adventist seminary, where a plant-based diet of grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables was provided."

Other recent studies comparing nutrition to COVID-19 outcomes show similar results with plant-based diets supporting a lower risk for moderate-to-severe COVID-19 symptoms. One study with almost 600,000 participants showed that those with a high consumption of fruits and vegetables had a reduced risk of COVID-19 of any severity by 9% and a reduced risk of severe COVID-19 by 41%. Another study in [health care workers](#) who were frequently exposed to COVID-19 in their clinical practice has demonstrated that those who reported being on a plant-based diet had a 73% lower risk of moderate-to-severe COVID-19.

Plant-based foods are rich in [nitrates](#) and [antioxidants](#) which support heart health and improved immunity against respiratory infections.

Dr. Kahleova also recently published the results of a [clinical research study conducted by the Physicians Committee](#) that found a plant-based diet helped hospital workers in Washington, D.C., improve their health and quality of life during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Based on the lessons from 1918 and the recent nutrition research in COVID-19, it seems probable that a healthful [plant-based diet](#) is a powerful tool to decrease the risk of severe COVID-19," Dr. Kahleova

says. "For this reason, plant-based [nutrition](#) should be promoted as one of the key public health measures in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and fighting today's pandemic."

More information: Hana Kahleova et al, The Role of Nutrition in COVID-19: Taking a Lesson from the 1918 H1N1 Pandemic, *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/15598276221097621](#)

Provided by Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

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