



Diabetes Life Lines

Beware of claims of “immune boosting” diets and pills

With the virus everywhere in the news, we are hearing a lot of claims about “healthy” diets and supplements that can supposedly protect you from the virus.

Everything from loading up on vitamin C to blueberries and other foods, drinks and vitamins has been claimed on social media and elsewhere as some sort of miracle fix. The truth is, they probably won’t do what some so-called “experts” claim.

Our immune system is the body’s army for fighting illness and infection. What we eat and drink can help our immune system do its job. Vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients are like tools for the immune system. We need the right tools to get the job done, but having extra of these tools won’t necessarily help and can actually be harmful. For example, our bodies need vitamin C, but for most people, taking high doses does not make you less likely to get colds and viruses¹. Zinc is an important mineral that helps the body fight infection and heal. However, people have reported losing their sense of smell after using some zinc nose sprays to treat or prevent colds². So, you want to get enough of these tools, but not too much.

When it comes to supplements in the form of pills or drinks, you should be very careful. The government does not oversee supplement makers in the same way it does medicines, so you do not always know if you are getting what the

label says is in the bottle. Most herbs, essential oils, and other cleanses do not have the research to back up the claims. Some herbs, vitamins, and essential oils can interact with medicines. Always talk to your doctor before trying any supplements, herbs, or oils.

Your digestive tract is a big part of your immune system. To keep your immune system in top shape, focus on eating foods that support a healthy digestive tract, such as a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Lean proteins, like chicken, fish, and tofu, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products, like milk and yogurt, are also part of a healthy diet. If you are not getting the foods you need to be healthy every day, talk to your doctor to see if you should take a multivitamin and mineral supplement.

If you have diabetes, continue to count your carbohydrates to support healthy blood sugar. Keeping your blood sugar in check helps your body’s immune system do its job. Exercise is also a good way to help your immune system. It keeps your body working well and keeps your blood sugar in check

The novel coronavirus is a very different and powerful virus, and it is unlikely that any supplement will stop this pandemic. We are going to have to depend on doctors and scientists to help us fight the disease and find a treatment for those who are sick now and a vaccine to prevent more people from getting sick. Eat a well-balanced diet and get regular exercise to help keep your body prepared to fight off the virus should you get it.

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- **COVID-19 Why are People with Diabetes at Greater Risk?**
- **Make a Healthy Pantry with Fewer Trips to the Store**
- **Recipe: Zesty Black-Eyed Pea Salad**

References:

1. National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements (2020). *Vitamin C: health professional's fact sheet*. Retrieved from: <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminC-HealthProfessional/>
2. National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements (2020). *Zinc: health professional's fact sheet*. Retrieved from: <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Zinc-HealthProfessional/>

COVID-19 - Why are people with diabetes at greater risk?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has listed people with diabetes as being high-risk for severe illness from Coronavirus (COVID-19).¹ What does this exactly mean and why? COVID-19, and many other viral infections, can cause serious health problems for people with diabetes and those with multiple health conditions.² This is because diabetes affects your entire body, including your immune system. Your immune system's job is to protect your body from diseases caused by germs such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites. If you get some type of infection, your immune system fights back. When you have diabetes, your immune system is not as strong or prepared to fight off these germs. When your body's defense system is low, it is easier for a virus to win the fight.

In addition, high blood sugar damages the blood vessels in your body. Your lungs are filled with tiny blood vessels. When you get a respiratory infection that affects your lungs, like the flu or COVID-19, people with diabetes may have a harder time recovering because those blood vessels may already be damaged. You may be more likely to get very sick from these diseases if you have high blood sugar and/or uncontrolled diabetes.²

By following CDC safety guidelines and controlling your blood sugar, you can reduce your risk of being exposed to this new virus and possibly the severity of the illness if you do get sick. Here are tips from the CDC and the American Diabetes Association (ADA) to stay healthy and safe during this time:

Take proper safety measures:

- Stay at home, if possible.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, or having been in a public place.
- If soap and water are not a choice, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, etc.
- Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs. Routinely disinfect commonly touched surfaces (for example tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks & cell phones).
- Stay away from crowds. Your risk of contact with viruses like COVID-19 is greater in crowded, closed-in spaces with little air and if there are people in the crowd who are sick.
- Avoid all non-essential travel including plane trips, and especially avoid boarding on cruise ships.



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Be prepared:

- Keep a list of phone numbers for your doctors, pharmacy, and insurance provider.
- Get extra refills on your prescriptions so you do not have to leave the house. If you can't get to the pharmacy, find out about having your medications delivered.
- Have enough insulin for the week ahead, in case you get sick or cannot get a refill.
- Have simple carbs on hand like regular soda, honey, jam, hard candies or popsicles to get your blood sugar up if you are at risk for hypoglycemia (very low blood sugar) and too ill to eat.
- Have extra supplies (testing strips, rubbing alcohol and soap), household items, and food on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home for a while.
- Keep a list of medications and doses (including vitamins and supplements).

If you feel sick:

- Call your doctor right away.
- Drink lots of fluids. If you're having trouble keeping water down, take small sips as often as you can.
- Regularly check and record your blood sugar to share with your doctor.

As always, it is equally important to have a balanced diet, exercise routine and positive outlook to boost your immune system and to stay healthy.

References:

1. People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/groups-at-higher-risk.html>. Published April 2, 2020. Accessed April 7, 2020.
2. Coronavirus COVID-19 FAQ. Coronavirus COVID-19 FAQ | ADA. <https://www.diabetes.org/covid-19-faq>. Accessed April 7, 2020.



Make a Healthy Pantry with Fewer Trips to the Store

During the COVID-19 crisis, we must “shelter-in-place” and limit trips outside of the home. Fewer trips to the grocery store means our food needs to last us longer. Because diabetes makes you at greater risk for getting the virus and complications from the virus, it is even more important that you try to keep yourself healthy. Good nutrition is a great place to start. Using MyPlate as a guide, you can make nutritious choices by adding some of these non-perishable (things that do not require refrigeration) food items to your pantry.

Grains

Whole grains are high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals, and provide energy. Whole grain pasta, whole wheat flour, whole grain cereal, brown or wild rice, quinoa, barley, amaranth, farro, oats, granola, tortillas, and popcorn are all excellent choices. When choosing pre-packaged items, aim for items low in sugar, high in fiber. For foods with several ingredients, like breads and cereals, look for the first word in the ingredients list to be “whole.” That is how you know it is a whole grain food.

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Protein

Beans and peas, whether canned or dried, are always a great go to source for protein and fiber and have no saturated fat or cholesterol. When choosing canned beans and peas, select items that are reduced sodium or no-salt added when available. Rinse beans and peas in a colander to further reduce sodium content prior to serving. Dried beans and peas must be soaked before conventional cooking (boiling, sautéing). You do not need to presoak if you are using a pressure cooker or multi-cooker (like an InstantPot®).

Canned meat and seafood such as chicken, salmon or tuna are convenient ways to have protein that does not need to be refrigerated. Choose those packed in water rather than oil and choose items with the least amount of sodium. Nuts, seeds, and nut butters (without added sugars) are another great way to get protein and are full of heart healthy unsaturated fats.

Dairy

Calcium and Vitamin D, necessary for strong bones, healthy teeth, and prevention of osteoporosis, are most often found in dairy foods. You can keep dry milk on hand. Some milk is treated in a special way called, Ultra High Temperature (UHT) pasteurization. This milk is liquid, but can be kept at room temperature. You'll find both dairy UHT milk and plant-based milk beverages, like soy and almond milk, on the shelves at your grocery store.

Fruits

Dried, canned, or fresh, fruit is full of fiber, vitamins and minerals. Fresh citrus (full of Vitamin C) can be kept at storage temp (50°F-70°F) for up to 10 days. Choose canned fruits in water or their own juice. Those canned in light or heavy syrup are high in sugar. If you must use a canned fruit in syrup, try rinsing it in a colander first to get rid of some of the sugar. Dried fruits can be enjoyed on their own or mixed with whole grain cereal and nuts for trail mix.

Vegetables

The beauty of canned vegetables is that you can enjoy your favorite regardless of the season. Vegetables are packed with fiber, vitamins, and various important minerals. When choosing vegetables, be sure to select those low in sodium or with no salt added. Draining and rinsing will also further reduce the sodium content.

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Zesty Black-Eyed Pea Salad

Serves 6

Ingredients

2 cans (15 oz each) black-eyed peas, drained, rinsed
1 can (15 oz) corn, drained, rinsed
1 can (15 oz) diced tomatoes, drained
2 tablespoons onion, finely chopped
1/4 cup green pepper, chopped
1 tablespoon garlic, minced
1/2 cup reduced-fat Italian dressing
Lemon pepper seasoning, to taste
Romaine lettuce, torn into small pieces
1 cucumber, sliced



Instructions:

1. In a medium bowl combine black-eyed peas, onions, peppers, corn, tomatoes, and garlic.
2. Add Italian dressing, mix lightly.
3. Sprinkle the top of the salad with lemon pepper seasoning.
4. Cover. For the fullest flavor, refrigerate and allow salad to marinate a couple hours or overnight.
5. When ready to serve, place 1 ½ cups of black-eyed pea salad on top of each plate of torn lettuce. Add sliced cucumber to the side.

Nutrition Facts per serving:

Calories: 219

Total Fat: 3 grams

Sodium: 613 milligrams

Carbohydrate: 42 grams

Fiber: 9 grams

Protein: 11 grams



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Dear Friend,

Diabetes Life Lines is a bi-monthly publication sent to you by your local county Extension agent.

It is written by an Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist and other health professionals from the University of Georgia. This newsletter brings you the latest information on diabetes self-management, healthy recipes and news about important diabetes-related events.

If you would like more information, please contact your local county Extension Office.

Yours truly,

County Extension Agent

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