

An Introduction to Supplements for Coronavirus Prevention and Treatment

By Steve Paulus, DO, MS

The novel coronavirus that is sweeping throughout the world is defined by the word “novel.” The disease caused by this coronavirus is called Covid-19. It is by definition different, unusual, and unique. Because of the novel nature of this virus, we currently have no vaccine to prevent and no pharmacologic prescriptions to treat. The ultimate treatment for nearly all patients with Covid-19 is to wait for the immune system to recognize and then naturally handle the infection. Even for those unfortunate few severe cases that require a ventilator, ultimately we are playing the waiting game—passing time in the ICU hoping for the immune system to engage sooner rather than later. Yes, of course there are scientific trials of old and new medications with the hope that we can get lucky and find a treatment for those with the most severe forms of this illness.

ISN'T IT INTERESTING

But isn't it interesting that the cutting edge dominant “treatment” is waiting for your immune system to do the work of healing this new invader? The tried and true 21st Century medical plan is to let the innate wisdom of your body do the work of healing!

Since no drugs exist to treat this infection we can rely upon complementary treatments to assist the body in mounting an immune response faster and addressing the inflammatory side effects in the early phases before the infection overwhelms the body. It is a race against time.

Even to use the word complementary is, in this situation, awkward. In the current dominant Western medical model, complementary medicine is defined as a method of health care that combines conventional medicine with those of alternative medicines. But in this case there are no conventional medicines for the treatment of Covid-19.

Now, complementary medicine is transformed into the dominant prevention and treatment option while we wait for conventional medicine to discover, through innovation combined with scientific experimentation, to develop *novel* medications to treat this *novel* virus.

While we wait—impatiently—there is an in between solution that has some evidence-based verification, that is the use of supplements. Supplements are defined as vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, enzymes, and other nutrients that support the body in the prevention or treatment of disease.

WHAT ABOUT USING SUPPLEMENT FOR CORONAVIRUS?

Because of the rapidly changing and novel nature of the Covid-19 infection we do not have any direct patient data or studies showing us how to treat this particular infection. We can extrapolate data from other coronavirus infections such as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) from 2002 and MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome) from 2012 as well as the several mild strains of coronavirus that are one of the causes of the common cold. We can also use evidence-based medicine—from treating influenza viruses—to reason which herbs and supplements can help mitigate the expression and severity of this current coronavirus outbreak.

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The vast majority of the American medical culture is based upon the empiric treatments or therapies based upon the experience of the doctor. In the absence of perfect information, I utilize over 30 years of educated clinical experience with conventional and complementary medicine to help lessen the frequency and consequences of viral infections.

THERE IS NO MAGIC ELIXIR

Please note that these strategies that use supplements are not a panacea. Rather, they can help stimulate the immune system, offer anti-viral effects, or have targeted anti-inflammatory effects providing *some* protection that may very likely decrease overall symptoms, length of illness, or severity of disease expression. But, there is no guarantee. One of my favorite adages is “perfect is the enemy of the good.” We don’t have an absolute treatment for Covid-19 so until conventional medicine catches up, we must use the best of what we currently have, and good enough works for me.

I have now expanded my coronavirus handouts into three key subsets: *Prevention*, *Immune Treatment of Acute Infections*, and *Anti-Inflammatory Treatment of Acute Infections*. Please use this *Introduction to Supplements for Coronavirus* with the other three handouts in total to personally address this complicated pandemic.

MORE IMPORTANTLY

Please remember, these strategies do not take the place of defending your sleep, eating a nutritious diet, exercising regularly, decreasing stress, stopping smoking, and limiting alcohol consumption significantly, etc. They do not take the place of helping to “flatten the curve” by sheltering at home, social distancing in public, and wearing a surgical mask when out in the world. *And of course, nothing takes the place of washing your hands after a potential exposure situation.*

To all my patients and friends:

Stay well, stay calm, and pay attention . . .

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