

An Introduction to Supplements for Coronavirus Prevention and Management

—PART ONE in the Coronavirus Strategy Series—

By Steve Paulus, DO, MS

At this point in the pandemic, there is a lot we know and a lot that we do not know. The pandemic began in early 2020 and three years later the SARS-CoV-2 virus is still alive and well. The Covid-19 virus has mutated several times and will continue to change as it evolves. New variants and subvariants will likely be circulating world-wide for an indefinite period of time.

I still encourage all of my patients to receive the original series of three vaccines to create a foundation of immunologic protection. There are select vulnerable individuals (the advanced elderly or those who are immune compromised) that should definitely get the fourth booster vaccine. The determination regarding new vaccines for the future are still being evaluated.

There is only one drug approved, at this time, in the United States by the FDA for the treatment of Covid-19: Paxlovid. This drug should be used for people at very high risk and must be prescribed by a physician. This drug has limited, partial effectiveness but has been shown to decrease hospitalization in the most vulnerable. Paxlovid has many side effects and drug interactions, so it must be administered carefully by a doctor familiar with your full medical history.

The dominant conclusive outpatient and inpatient treatment for Covid-19 is waiting for your immune system to kick in and kill the virus naturally. Nearly all of the hospital treatments are supportive not curative.

The FDA is clear however, that the use of supplements is not to be advertised as a “treatment” for Covid-19. There are, however, supplements that have evidence-based support for the supportive care of coronavirus infections. And, there are supplements that have been proven helpful for other viral upper respiratory infections that likely are beneficial for Covid-19.

ISN'T IT INTERESTING

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 definitely treat this infection, we can consider using 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 prevailing 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 great conventional medicines for the treatment of Covid-19.

WHAT ABOUT USING SUPPLEMENTS FOR CORONAVIRUS?

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.

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. And, increasingly over the past three years research is adding to our understanding of how to treat and support patients suffering from Covid-19.

Steve Paulus, DO, MS

www.stevepaulus.com

The vast majority of the day-to-day American medical treatments in doctors' offices are founded upon empiricism—or therapies based upon the experience of the doctor rather than high quality research. In the absence of perfect information, I utilize over 30 years of educated, expert 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 limited anti-viral properties, or have **targeted** anti-inflammatory effects providing *some* protection that may very likely **decrease** overall symptoms, **shorten** the length of illness, or **lessen** the severity of this disease. I believe that the use of supplements decreases the overall viral load by multiple mechanisms of action, thus **decreasing the intensity** of the infection. In using targeted supplements, the risks are extremely low and the rewards are huge. 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.** *Remember, Osteopathic Manipulation can be an effective way to help stimulate your immune system, help address side effects from the infection, and support a more rapid recovery from any upper or lower respiratory infection.*

Please use this PART ONE: *Introduction to Supplements for Coronavirus* as your philosophical foundation. Access the other Covid-19 handouts to address the specifics of targeted prevention and supportive treatments for this complicated disease.

A TEAM APPROACH

If you are reading this article then at some point you may become a patient during this pandemic. If you become sick with the coronavirus, I strongly recommend that you DO NOT try to muddle through this unpredictable illness alone. If you are diagnosed with Covid-19, then being managed by your physician is essential. At the very least be in contact with your personal physician so they can stay informed regarding your progress or lack of progress. If you are able to stay at home to be treated/monitored, that is preferred. But if your condition deteriorates then you must go to the hospital. Your doctor is a key component of your health care team.

MORE IMPORTANTLY

Please remember, these strategies do not take the place of defending your sleep, eating a nutritious diet, moving and 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, wearing a surgical mask when out in the world, and 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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