

Observer article--- Facing the Challenge of COVID-19

Life on planet Earth has been upended by a microscopic speck. Since a vaccine designed to immunize, or a drug hoping to cure COVID-19 are not yet available, the best advice that 21st century medicine and technology currently offer is hand washing and social distancing. These steps are, in fact, very effective in reducing disease, yet we can do more than merely wait for an uncertain solution. Past experience has taught us that basic measures, including sanitation, good nutrition and personal hygiene are the most important tools in preventing the spread of a pandemic. We can build on this knowledge to help our bodies do what they are designed to do – address challenges and remain healthy.

Viruses are sub-microscopic specks of genetic information, found everywhere life exists! Viruses infect everything: people, animals, plants and even other microbes. They constantly change, or mutate, to improve their chances of survival. Viruses are biological Ninjas; they are merely stealthy packets of genetic information that require living cells to do their work. Viruses invade cells and take over the machinery, commanding the cell to make more viruses, all while hiding inside the cell where the immune system can't detect them. Yet over 99% of the million known viral strains are harmless to people, and some are even beneficial. Viruses and other microbes have co-existed with humans for millions of years. The human body was made to survive viral challenge; your own body has endured countless invasions from viruses, bacteria and other microbes in its lifetime. COVID-19 is merely the latest variation. We are swimming in a sea of microbes; they are all around us, on our skin and in our guts. This is business as usual for the body!

Healthy cells are much more resistant to disease than distressed cells, and many avenues exist to improve cells' inborn immune defenses. Circulation of the blood and lymphatic systems deliver immune factors and nutrients to cells, while removing wastes and toxins. Help your circulatory system do its job through staying well-hydrated (drink half your body weight in ounces of water daily), deep breathing, movement, stretching and ending hot showers with a cold rinse. Regular physical exertion improves immunity, while also stabilizing energy, moods, blood sugar, and hormone levels. Fresh whole foods (versus packaged) provide vitamins (especially vitamin D), minerals and other nutrients required for efficient immune function. Fresh air, full sunlight, clean water, plenty of sleep, and good mental health are all key to stronger defenses. Medicinal plants are another avenue to explore to enhance immune function; some that have been successfully used for centuries are garlic, licorice, echinacea, curcumin and ginseng. These are but a few examples of plants that fight viral infection, pneumonia and inflammation directly and indirectly. Remember, the main variables which determine whether or not illness occurs are the strength of the "pathogen" (i.e. COVID) versus the strength of the "host" (your name here). Now is a good time to strengthen the host.

Getting sick is a test for the body. Every day, we are exposed to many challenges to our health: viruses, poor sleep, stress, inactivity, other people, moods, etc. A healthy mind and body will get stronger with each new challenge, so long as the challenge is not too great. For example, moderate exercise may be tiring, but eventually makes you stronger. Learning a new skill is challenging, but can be rewarding. Likewise, your immune system gets smarter and stronger when it overcomes an illness. The key is to help it win. Improve your resistance by improving your health, and feel better every day doing it! Take good care of yourself in every way you can.