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Your Nutrition and COVID-19

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Does what you eat make a difference?

During these uncertain times, we may feel helpless and easily misled by inaccurate reporting or well-meaning friends and family. Teasing apart fact from fiction can prove to be difficult, especially when the experts are still learning so much about COVID-19.

Here's what we know. Good nutrition works to enhance immunity, decrease the risk of chronic disease, and aid in the recovery from illness. The potency of lean protein, the vigor of vegetables, and the capacity of whole-grain carbohydrates to strengthen our cells for a daily fight is impressive.

We need to equip our bodies with what we need to be healthy. The basics of healthy eating include balance, adequacy, variety, and moderation. The further we get from whole foods, the more difficult it becomes to realize their powers.

Whole grains are important because refined grains undergo a milling process that strips the entire grain of its germ and bran, leaving it without many B-vitamins, iron, fatty acids, and fiber. To better understand "processing," think of an apple. Peel it, slice it, and then expose it to air and packaging. Bake it into an apple pie. We lose vital nutrients with each step.

Research supports the many benefits of whole foods as a source of immunity-supporting nutrients:

- Beta carotene (found in orange and dark green plant foods) serves as an antioxidant and plays a role in the development of immune cells. You can get vitamin C in orange juice, but did you know that bell peppers, broccoli, strawberries, and potatoes are also good sources? In addition to enhancing immunity, vitamin C helps to build collagen, a structural protein in the body.
- Zinc works with many proteins to help with immunity and growth and development. The best sources of zinc come from protein foods, such as lean meats, chicken, seafood, nuts, and beans.

Beyond these and other nutrients, phytochemicals, and fiber substances in real foods can enhance nutrient absorption. A supplement can never replace the opportunity to slow down, catch up, and genuinely enjoy a home-cooked family meal. Whole foods and a diet filled with powerful immunity-enhancing nutrients can give mealtime the power of prevention!