

Some Reflections on the Current Corona Virus---and Maybe Some Help, Too

Namaste, everyone,

I write this on the day of the spring equinox of 2020, in the midst of wide-scale closures of schools and universities, faith community meeting places, food-service establishments, public events, and other places where people commonly congregate. First of all, we should all be extremely grateful to our courageous medical professionals, health care and public health workers, grocery and pharmacy clerks, our governor and public officials, and the businesses and groups of volunteers now helping out and poised to continue to do so if a local crisis ensues.

When the ebola virus entered the US several years ago, the disease was rapidly contained and eliminated from our country through the tried-and-true public health methods of quarantine and sanitation. These methods are undoubtedly helping us now. At the same time, we should realize that this latest COVID-19 corona virus is particularly hard to contain. One of the reasons for this is that the virus seems to have quite a long incubation period (the time between exposure and development of symptoms). And the infected person can apparently shed the virus for quite a while before he or she even realizes that they have it. It can survive on surfaces for (latest estimate) around three days: meaning doorknobs, desks and counters, items we hand each other, items we pick up in stores, etc. This virus, like most flu viruses, is also airborne, meaning that even if one is quite careful about hand-washing (and we all should be), it may not always be enough. (This last is the reason for the six-foot social distancing recommendations between people). And finally, in the first round of a novel virus, there is not much residual immunity in the population, and there is a lag period before biological and medical research can catch up to the novel pathogen with proven treatments or vaccines.

As a complementary health-care practitioner, all I can offer in response to your questions is: “yes there *may* be some additional precautions we can take”. But, having said that, I want to be clear that when we say a certain herb or medicine has “anti-viral” or “anti-biotic” properties, what we mean is that research has shown it to be effective against *some* viruses, or *some* bacteria. This does not mean that the substance is effective against *all* viruses or *all* bacteria.

Thus, while I have selected a few Ayurvedic and western herbs which have demonstrated anti-viral activity in lab tests (some even against other corona viruses)—***we cannot be certain that any of them will work specifically against this particular corona virus.***

In response to questions I have received, my own personal attitude is this: if natural antiviral and respiratory-support herbs that might possibly help with prevention or symptom-reduction are inexpensive, available, and have few or no side effects, it

makes more sense to me personally to try them than to do nothing. And for others who also feel that way, it is probably better to assemble things to try for prevention and reduction of symptoms before we get exposed or sick than to have to obtain them afterward. And, in a situation like this one, where we are unsure which, if any, of our anti-viral and respiratory-support herbs may be helpful, it also makes sense to try more than one thing at a time, which is, of course, the traditional Ayurvedic approach: lifestyle, diet, herbs, Yoga therapies. (Right now, the lifestyle part is pretty simple: Try to get adequate sleep, exercise, healthy meals, and follow the current public health recommendations).

So I have prepared a list. I don't personally sell any health care products myself, and I do not have a website where you can buy things. Most of the items on my list are commonly available in grocery stores, health food stores, or pharmacies. The Ayurvedic herbal combination I suggest at the end of the list can be ordered in traditional dried and powdered form from either of two local Ayurvedic pharmacists in Boulder: Louise Sanchez 303-546-0952 (if you want to pay by check) or Annalise Ozuls 303-913-7236 (if you want to pay by credit card). Both will mail the product to you.

List of my Favorite Possible Recommendations

- 1) Keep up vitamin D levels (I have a slight preference for the liquid form since I suspect it is more readily absorbable).
- 2) Stock up on elderberry syrup (sometimes called elderberry extract)---these come in different strengths, so follow the directions on the labels. (Note: it's not OK to consume the raw berries---they need to be specifically prepared before ingesting). Elderberry has an excellent record for reducing the severity and duration of both colds and flu, and some people use it as a preventative when they think they have been exposed.
- 3) Lysine---this is an amino acid natural to the body. Higher levels of lysine seem to help inhibit viruses from attaching to mucousal membranes. (I first learned about it many years ago, when some of my vets began recommending it as a major treatment for my cats' respiratory viruses).
- 4) Don't neglect to take a variety of different "pre-biotic" and probiotic foods in your diet. In the last decade, we have learnt a great deal more about the important role the gut biome plays in our immune function.
- 5) Astragalus is a Chinese herb widely praised for its ability to enhance the immune response. It is available in veggie caps. The reason I did not include it in my formulation is because it is not recommended for use in cases of some autoimmune and chronic inflammatory diseases. And while it is strongly recommended as a preventative in non-pregnant individuals, some practitioners are of the opinion that it should *not* be taken *after* one becomes ill.

6) Traditional Hathayoga “full yogic breathing” (in some Yoga traditions, this is referred to as “the three part breath”). Based on Yogic teachings, as well as research done with high altitude climbers, it helps to strengthen the lungs and enhance lung capacity. If you know it, practice it 10 min/day. (If you don’t, I can coach you over the phone).

7) Warm organic coconut oil: Said to be antiviral, a small amount can be rubbed inside the nose and sniffed into the sinuses as a possible preventative aid.

8) If you do become ill, and you have a fever, remember that Ayurveda recommends avoiding cold foods and iced drinks, and taking warm soups and boiled-water herbal teas in preference to solid foods until the temperature returns to normal.

9) Ayurvedic herbal formulation: In the Ayurvedic Medicine tradition of northern India in which I have been trained, it is customary, as my current patients know, to treat illnesses by combining several herbs together into a formula so that they enhance each other’s effects. Under ideal conditions, we prefer to formulate individually rather than just supply a formula for a given condition. People are different constitutionally, temperamentally, genetically, and in terms of their medical history and age category. But in this situation, where time may be of the essence, and conditions are far from ideal, I have put together a general formula, as is also permissible in the tradition of Ayurveda. It contains antiviral, respiratory-supporting, immune-supporting, and balancing herbs and spices, for short-term use; as an aid to supporting health and possibly helping to reduce viral respiratory symptoms. The formula contains, in varying quantities: tulsi, licorice root, garlic, mahasudarshan churna, talisadi churna, ginger, guduchi, kalmegh, berberis, neem, pomegranate, rosemary, jatamansi, amla, pippali, and turmeric. It may be modified as more information becomes available.

Please do not take this formula if you are pregnant or if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure, or within one week of surgery, or if you take blood-thinning medications. As per Colorado law, it is not intended to be given to children under two years of age. If you have a serious medical condition for which you are taking western medication, please run the list of herbs in the formulation by your prescribing physician in order to obtain his/her consent before ordering it. While drug-herb interactions are not common, they do exist.

Also, if you have any digestive problems with the formula or any other side effects, stop taking it and call me so I can adjust the formula properly for you individually. (Sometimes, just adding a few kitchen spices is all we need).

And, if you prefer to start out with a personalized formula, or you want me to coach you in the breathing practice, feel free to call me. In compliance with local and state recommendations, I am suspending in-person consultations for the duration of the crisis, but I am still available for consultations via phone.

And finally, and most importantly, should your symptoms be severe or quickly worsening, please contact your local corona virus hotline if such is available, or your physician, or go to an urgent care facility or the emergency room.

Wishing you the best,

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