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As flu, colds, COVID take over the season, what will you turn to? Some consider vitamin shots, IV therapy, probiotics



Healthy Choice Wellness Center/Courtesy

Nurse Lauren Towery gives an intramuscular vitamin injection to customer, Claudia Sepulveda at the Healthy Choice Wellness Center in Fort Lauderdale's Casbah Spa. (Healthy Choice Wellness Center/Courtesy)

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Alondra Ramos rolled up her sleeve this week for a vitamin shot she hopes will prevent her from getting her husband's cold.

The Fort Lauderdale accountant says the shot, a mix of potent vitamins, usually boosts her immunity levels when traveling and during her busy season at work — now she's counting on it for cold and flu season.

"It's like taking a high-dosage multivitamin," Ramos said.

Cases of RSV, COVID-19 and the flu are on the rise in the United States, and Florida is one of the states now reporting high levels of respiratory illnesses. Along with vaccines, vitamin injections and vitamin IV therapy are among the tools people are turning to this winter to help ward against these hard-hitting viruses and bacteria circulating, which also include strep throat.



Kelly Rice, vice president of operations at Healthy Choice Wellness Center, says her company has been hired by several Broward County businesses this winter season, including Ramos', to

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“You are giving your body nutrients to function at optimal capacity,” she said. “Every virus or infection when you get sick is going to behave differently, but allowing your body to absorb the nutrients within seconds to minutes does help your body fight it off.”

Vitamin IV therapy also has become popular to boost immunity levels, taking about 30 minutes to an hour to drop electrolytes, minerals and vitamins into the body through an arm vein. It bypasses the digestive system to deliver hydration, nutrients and minerals directly into your bloodstream.

Dr. Sam Torbati, co-chairman of Emergency Medicine at Cedars-Sinai, says that’s a reason to be cautious.

“When you put something straight into the bloodstream, you bypass all of your body’s built-in safeguards and filters,” Torbati says [on the California hospital system’s blog](#). “You want to make sure you know exactly what’s in it.”

Some doctors say IV vitamin therapy is generally considered safe if a trained professional administers the treatment in a clean environment and uses sterile equipment. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration also has [urged caution](#) with ensuring vitamin IV treatments and shots are done under sanitary conditions. The FDA considers vitamin infusions and vitamins taken orally to be dietary supplements and [does not regulate dietary supplements](#) for safety and effectiveness.

Anyone with allergies should ask about ingredients. Likewise, anyone on multiple medications should speak with their healthcare provider first.

Although no medications or supplements can cure the flu or prevent coronavirus, experts say some measures do naturally help support immunity.

Liquid vitamins: Nadine Mikati, assistant professor of nutrition at Nova Southeastern University, says those seeking an instant immunity boost could try cold-pressed juices with ginger, turmeric, elderberry and other vitamins. “You have to read the label and look at the ingredients to make sure it’s not full of sugar,” she says.

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Susan Stocker / South Florida Sun Sentinel

In this file photo, Laurie Janko of Sprouts Farmers Market in Dania Beach sets up the herbal supplements and vitamins section for customers. (Susan Stocker / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Probiotics: Mikati also recommends probiotics. “People think it’s for the gut, but there’s research on how it boosts immunity,” she said. Early research has found probiotics stimulate the immune response with an increase in specific antibody production. Probiotics come in beverage form like kombucha, in cultured dairy products such as yogurt, and in fermented foods such as kefir and kimchi. They also come in a powder or pill form.

Vitamin supplements: It is usually better to get the vitamins you need from food, rather than a pill, but Mikati says supplements like Vitamin C, D and zinc can help to increase immunity levels. Check with a doctor, though, to find out whether supplements might interact or interfere with prescription medicines.

- **Vitamin C** – In the body, vitamin C acts as an antioxidant, helping to protect cells from damage caused by free radicals. Research has found vitamin C does not prevent colds but can reduce their length and severity. The recommended daily amount is 90 mg for men and 75 mg for women. “There’s not a huge benefit of taking more vitamin C than what’s recommended,” Makati says. In fact, high doses can cause digestive disturbances such as diarrhea and nausea.
- **Vitamin D** – Many people don’t get enough vitamin D in their diets. Some studies showed taking vitamin D daily protects against acute respiratory infections and may improve the body’s response to antivirals.

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A balanced diet: One of the best ways to keep immunity levels high is eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, and reducing the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and sugar you eat, says Meryl Brandwein, a dietitian, nutritionist and owner of [Brandwein Institute for Nutrition and Wellness](#) in Cooper City. “The key is consistency,” she adds. “Foods like garlic, onions, shallots and leeks are good for the immune system. Just be consistent with consuming those kind of foods.”

“Most women don’t get enough iron, which is crucial for immune health. Liver is a good source of iron, but no one eats it. Things like eggs and grass-fed meat have iron.”

Dr. Brett Osborn, a neurosurgeon at [St. Mary’s Medical Center](#) and a longevity medicine specialist at [Senolytix](#) in West Palm Beach, says diet may play the biggest role in immunity health.

“When you have poor nutrition, it can cause inflammation. You are priming the pump and then, when you get exposed to a pathogen, you can have a heightened response,” he says.

To keep inflammation minimal, he advises eating lots of colorful vegetables; protein such as fish, chicken and turkey; and good fats like olive oil, avocado and walnuts.

Quality sleep: Adults should get seven to nine hours of sleep each day, while children need eight to 14 hours, depending on age. When you are sleep-deprived, your natural immune cells, or T cells, decline, and inflammatory cytokines (inflammation cells) rise — and that puts you at a disadvantage when exposed to a virus. With sleep issues on the rise, about a third of Americans get less than the recommended amount per night

Brandwein says the solution is to create good sleep hygiene. “Carve out time for winding down. This is where breath work comes in amazingly well,” she says.

She recommends the 4-7-8 breathing pattern, saying that “it calms your nervous system. People have to get out of their own way and not get into bed and scroll on their phones. It’s part of self-care.”

Movement: Exercise increases the circulation of immune cells that find pathogens like viruses and wipe them out. The benefit, though, eventually goes away unless you keep working out consistently. Experts recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week, which can include anything from walking to jumping rope. Osborn says strength training is great exercise and something people of all ages can do. He recommends strength training three days a week, and endurance exercises two days a week.

Stress reduction: At the same time viruses are in peak season, stress levels rise with travel and holiday shopping and activities. “Be careful with the people who you are around this time of year,” Brandwein said. “You do not want to be around toxic energy. Those relationships drain us and drain our immune systems.”

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Sunlight and socialization: Being outside in nature can reduce stress levels and give immunity levels a bump, Osborn says. “Your eyes must see the sun every day.” In his opinion, the best time to go outside is in morning light. “Stand outside for 10 or 15 minutes. It does wonders for the brain and immune system,” he says.

Being around other people can be a boost, too. “It’s not a good thing for your immune system when you are depressed and alone,” he says.

Alcohol moderation: Alcohol consumption becomes a slippery slope during the winter, but something to consider cutting back on going into the respiratory virus season. Alcohol reduces the number of antibodies available to fight off infection. “Alcohol impacts how your body detoxifies,” Brandwein says. “If your body is not getting rid of toxins, they recirculate and impact the immune system. I’m not saying don’t drink and have cookies. You need to find moderation over the holidays.”

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