

Immunity Health Hacks for



functional medicine associates



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associates

At Functional Medicine Associates we help people suffering with chronic disease to get better and help to optimise the health of others. Over the years our work has given us the opportunity to understand and apply new science to individuals and importantly, to test whether this has been effective.

Whilst COVID-19 continues to dominate our world in 2021, it continues to give us the opportunity to reflect on our lifestyle and how it affects our overall health. Let's make some changes to our health behaviours, focusing on optimising the immune system to give it the best chance of keeping safe.

**Here are
our top 10
immunity
health
hacks to
follow in
2021...**





1. HELP YOUR BACTERIA

You are a superorganism, a combination of human cells and bacterial cells – in fact you are more ‘bacteria’ than you are ‘human’.
There is not a surface on or in your body that is not covered by a unique group of bacteria.

Scientists have recently coined a new term for this, “Holobiont”, defined as different species working together in the same space, such as the body, for the benefit of all. Get used to it, you are more bacteria than human, and your health is determined by the health of the bacteria you carry.

We see an increasing number of patients who are unwell and have not responded to conventional treatment only to discover that their bacteria have not been investigated. Many suffer with low immunity and yet have never had their GI tract investigated despite the fact that 70% of the immune system resides there.

Poor food choices and in particular low fibre in the diet is a major concern. Fibre is not just for keeping you regular but is the preferred food for feeding your resident bacteria. Your gut bacteria love fibre! Feed them lots of different fibre and they will help support your immunity and control inflammation and infection. The best way to do this is to eat a ‘rainbow of colours’. In other words, a wide variety of different coloured plant-based foods. Think fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, spices, herbs etc. The wider the variety, the better.

Medical research is currently dominated by the need to better understand our relationship with our microbes. You are no longer you; you are you and the bacteria you carry. Bacteria want a good host, as a good host lets them be healthy which in turn keeps you healthy. Feed them well, keep stress under control, exercise and sleep well and you give the bacteria their best chance of keeping your immunity optimal.



2. USE SOCIAL NETWORKS, NOT SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT YOUR IMMUNITY

Have you ever considered how our social interactions and our relationships [can influence our health and our immunity?](#)

We often hear, and common sense tells us, that being socially isolated is not good for health. Being with friends and family and interacting socially on the other hand makes us feel good. Research in this field has demonstrated that positive relationships not only help us to feel good but can help to build better immunity whereas negative relationships or social adversity can increase inflammation and reduce protection against viral attack.

Our connection with others influences our health behaviours and choices, both good and bad. The social networks we build pervade all aspects of human health and are one of the most important influencing factors to our health. We are interconnected to others in a web like manner.

Our health is not determined so much by our own decisions, but by what our friends, family and colleagues do and the relationships we have with them. So, for 2021 focus on the relationships that are positive and productive for you and your immune health.

“This phenomenon is known as network medicine”



3. TEST YOUR VITAMIN D LEVELS

The evidence is overwhelming that Vitamin D is a major player in allowing your immune system to work optimally. In terms of Covid-19, research has now shown that a deficiency of this vitamin can not only put you at greater risk of developing Covid-19 but also of suffering more severe consequences.

Vitamin D levels will be at their lowest in the winter and early spring months so your risk of colds and infections at this time of the year increases.

Our advice is to get tested. This can easily be done at home by ordering an inexpensive home test kit. Supplementing with Vitamin D is also inexpensive.

So important is Vitamin D to good health and optimal immunity that we test our patients 2-3 times a year just to ensure that they are maintaining adequate levels.

“Supplementing with Vitamin D is also inexpensive”



4. SUPPLEMENT YOUR DIET

There are many that still argue that you can get all your nutrient needs from the foods you eat. Whilst we whole-heartedly agree with the concept of food first, we have failed to see “foods only” provide a patient with their complete nutrient needs in over 20 years of clinical practice.

Using comprehensive nutrient testing and individualised genetic data we have found that even the very best diets have needed a little bit of help from external supplementation. Both the science and our experience suggest a good quality 1 a day multi-vitamin and mineral goes a long way to help optimise levels and boost immune health.

“A good quality 1 a day multi-vitamin and mineral goes a long way”



5. EXERCISE TO RE-BOOT AN AGEING IMMUNE SYSTEM

Exercise allows the immune system to get around the body more effectively. The increase in blood flow and blood pressure allows better exchange between blood and lymph which allows a better delivery service of immune cells to far off places within our body such as the lung fields. This allows for better “immunosurveillance”.

In other words we are more able to identify and react to invaders because we can deploy more troops and more efficiently, to hard-to-reach areas and better control the borders. The more this happens the better the effect over time, hence the need for consistent moderate exercise. Regular exercise throughout life also helps slow down “immunosenescence”, how our immune system ages.

This is a critical point when looking at the COVID data as the majority of deaths are ones of advancing age. How well your immune system is capable of protecting you in your later years is dependant largely on how healthy you have been throughout your life.

Your immune system can, however, be remodelled for improvement at any stage of your life and health, by exercise and all the other healthy lifestyle activities. Age and sex-matched studies between elderly physically active and sedentary men and women show marked differences in immune status. Simply put, we delay the ageing of the immune system by regular physical activity.



6. SLEEP WELL TO IMPROVE IMMUNITY

Think of sleep as putting your car into the repair garage overnight to be fully checked out, repaired, revved up and primed for the next day.

Optimal sleep primes specific parts of your immune system to do the best job of fighting off invaders such as viruses. It therefore goes without saying that the more optimal sleep time and quality, the better your ability to do this.

Whilst you are asleep your body gets to work making proteins called Cytokines that help fight inflammation and infection. But your body can only do this effectively if it gets adequate sleep. If you fail to get enough sleep, then your risk of catching colds and infections increases. So, the more time spent in the garage overnight (most experts think 7-9 hours) the best chance you have of supercharging your immunity.

optimal sleep = optimal immunity



7. HUG TO HELP IMMUNITY

If you hug the right person it's a nice experience, this experience is driven by the release of the social bonding hormone call Oxytocin. Oxytocin makes us feel nice, it makes us feel more connected to others, more part of the tribe. Not only can it reduce stress and anxiety, it can lower blood pressure and positively affect our immunity. [Hugging can also reduce pain](#) which is so helpful to many in lockdown.

So, whilst in lockdown we can help to self-medicate by regular daily hugging. The more you hug the [less likely you are to get sick and if you do get sick](#) the symptoms may be less severe. Oxytocin helps [your immunity to stay in great shape](#) so let's get that daily dose of hugs.

“Oxytocin
is the yin to
stresses yang”



8. TAKE A 'NATURE PILL' 3 TIMES A WEEK TO REDUCE STRESS AND HELP IMMUNITY

We instinctively know that being outside and surrounded by nature is good for all and even more so during lockdown. Common sense dictates that being stuck inside your house 24/7 may not provide an ideal environment for body or soul. Lots of scientific studies back this up. Humans are designed for being with nature and when we are with nature, we see a whole host of improvements in health parameters such as better sleep, decreased blood pressure and stress reduction to name a few.

What if there was panacea or a 'nature pill' that could help reduce stress? What if that panacea was simply time spent being exposed to nature for a set period of time each day? [In a recently published study](#) researchers from the University of Michigan tested this theory on a group of urban dwellers and were able to show that not only does spending time having a nature experience (defined as spending time in an outdoor space that brings a sense of contact with nature) reduce hormone markers of stress, they have also demonstrated that there is an optimal amount of time that must be spent outside in order to achieve these benefits.

The results of the above study revealed an impressive decrease in the stress hormone cortisol following exposure to nature. The greatest percentage decrease in stress occurred within the first 20-30 minutes of nature exposure. This new study indicates that there are demonstrable benefits from even a 20-30 minute nature experience three times a week and this can be achieved even by urban dwellers as the green space needn't be a large woodland, it can be as small as a local park/square, or even a rooftop garden terrace

At Functional Medicine Associates we are now recommending an outside break from the office/home office environment of, ideally, 20-30 minutes per day. If possible, this break should be spent in a local park, square or any other green space close to the office/home office. It might even be your office rooftop garden terrace. We encourage our clients to source a nearby 'nature nook' that they can retreat to for some stress reduction each day. Use this time to sit quietly and eat a healthy lunch in a calm and relaxed manner, away from the pressure of work. See your lunch break not only as an opportunity to eat healthily but also as a chance to reduce stress.



9. FIND DAILY SANCTUARY

Why is sanctuary so important? Let's come back to stress again...

Stress is actually good for the body in small amounts. Small but consistent exposures to a stressor cause our body to react in a way that is beneficial to our health. We call this [hormesis](#). Persistent stress however, wears down our mind, body and immune system. This wear and tear from stress is something we can measure, it's called the [allostatic load and the higher the allostatic load, the higher the risk of most chronic diseases and immune function](#).

Our body is designed to adapt to what the environment and situation throw back at us. The more stressful the environment the more your body fires up to fight the fire. As a consequence, however, over time your body forgets how to relax. We end up in a perpetual state of fight or flight with no rest and digest. Let's face it, this continues to be the picture of modern living.

For anyone who works with our team we insist that they must find a time, place, person etc where they can experience that daily sanctuary. We have seen numerous examples of executives who are overly stressed at work and then come home to a stressful household. In these cases, the stress response never switches off and people never get the chance to relax, repair and recuperate. You can never be healthy in this situation.

Daily sanctuary is such a simple but powerful health intervention. You need to find it! What is it that allows you to relax? A couple of chapters of a great book, the nature experience, a phone call with a friend/relative, listening to your favourite music, going for a walk, doing some meditation? This is for you to find. The more sanctuary you have, the more balanced your stress response will be and the healthier your immunity will be.



10. WORK WITH A FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE CLINICIAN ON YOUR HEALTH

Functional Medicine was seen as one of the [Top 10 trends in Silicon Valley in 2019](#). Clinicians in Functional Medicine have been around for years and are trained to take a global view on health, focusing on the person, not just the disease, treating not just the symptoms but finding the root cause of why the symptoms/disease exists.

A recent study published in the [Journal of the American Medical Association \(JAMA\)](#), shows that using a functional medicine approach to treat chronic disease produces better health outcomes than traditional methods. The study

took place at the prestigious [Cleveland Clinic for Functional Medicine](#) which has experienced “explosive growth” since opening five years ago.

As more studies will go on to show, this model of care provides a new operating system that works to reverse illness, promote health, and optimize function by addressing underlying causes, symptoms, and functional imbalances. It’s the perfect model for solving the chronic disease crisis given that almost all health care budgets in western societies are spent in this area.

“You may not be aware but there is a revolution occurring in health care and it’s called Functional Medicine”

Thank you for reading our 10 immune health hacks for 2021 and beyond.

Feel free to share this brochure with friends and colleagues and if you require more information on how we can help you optimise your health or to become part of our mailing list, contact us on any of the details below.

At Functional Medicine Associates, we help you back to health by finding the root causes of your illness. Located in the prestigious Harley Street district of Central London, our team of IFM certified practitioners has had many years of experience in helping patients improve their health and well-being through our functional medicine approach.



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