

## Coronavirus claims: Hype or hope?

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We all want to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, yet amid the onslaught of information circulating right now, it can be hard to tease out what is true and useful. That's why we asked top doctors to cut through the confusion and offer up common-sense strategies to stay healthy and safe

**Claim: Gargling with salt water can cure COVID-19**

**Hope:** While gargling with salt water won't cure the novel coronavirus COVID19, daily gargles are a simple way to soothe irritated tissues and reduce inflammation, notes Terry Wahls, M.D., a clinical professor of medicine at Iowa University and author of The Wahls Protocol. This makes them helpful not only for easing sore throats but also in preventing worrisome coughs—the last thing anyone wants right now. Dr. Wahls recommends gargling with a mix of 8 oz. of warm water and 1 tsp. of virus-fighting iodized salt. Bonus: The very act of gargling activates the nervous system response to produce calming effects. Dr. Wahls adds, “That's why I'm gargling more than ever these days!”

**Claim: Vitamin C can reduce COVID-19 symptoms**

**Hope:** ICU doctors in some COVID-19 hot spots are currently giving hospitalized patients intravenous vitamin C, and trials of the treatment are underway. And according to Dr. Wahls, boosting your levels of the vitamin via foods and supplements can rally your immune defenses to help fend off infection and increase the odds that anything you do catch ends up being mild. “Vitamin C increases the production of immune cells that literally ‘eat’ both bacteria and viruses,” she points out. “And since studies have already shown the vitamin can speed recovery from colds and make symptoms milder, increasing your intake makes sense.

**Claim: Taking ibuprofen makes COVID-19 worse**

**Hope:** In a recent letter to *The Lancet*, French researchers voiced concerns that the commonly used medication may raise levels of an enzyme the virus uses to bind to cells. And while there's currently no proof that taking ibuprofen will increase susceptibility to coronavirus or worsen infection, opting for acetaminophen to treat aches and pains is a prudent bet. “The jury is still out on ibuprofen and coronavirus, and we're seeing some evidence that it might not be as threatening as first thought,” notes Alexander Salerno, M.D., a family practice physician in New Jersey. “But acetaminophen is much kinder to the stomach and kidneys, so right now, it's the first thing I would take.”

**Claim: Wearing a face mask prevents infection**

**Hope:** Wearing a mask is not a guarantee against infection, and experts are quick to point out that the hospital-grade masks that filter the tiniest viral particles are desperately needed by those on the medical front lines. That said, in early April, the CDC issued the recommendation that folks wear cloth face coverings in public settings where maintaining a “social distance” of 6 feet is difficult. “As long as they have a good seal around the mouth

nose and chin, they can offer valuable protection when you're in public places like grocery stores," says Philip Oubre, M.D., a functional medicine physician based in Austin, Texas. The reason: A mask with a good seal around the nose, cheeks and chin acts as a barrier to reduce the spread of virus-laden droplets that travel through the air when you or others breathe, talk, cough or sneeze. "I believe in homemade masks so much," says Dr. Oubre, "that I've advised my own parents to wear them!" — Melissa Gotthardt