Things we should be doing while we are in quarantine by Sherman Coleman

This is a very trying time. COVID 19 is a pandemic that is sweeping across the world. Virtually no one can escape its effects. The current number of reported cases along with stay at home mandates issued by governments and recommendations from the CDC send the same message. If you haven’t been exposed to COVID 19 yet eventually you will. If COVID 19 was Thanos from the Avenger series it would be snapping its fingers saying, “I am inevitable”. This could paint a very bleak picture and incite fear about the future. I am writing this article because I believe there is hope. I believe there are 7 things we can do from our homes to keep ourselves and our families healthy.

1. Eat more produce- We know that there are certain micronutrients that can boost our immune system and help us fend off viruses. The key players are Vitamins A, C, E, and the B vitamins especially B6. Many of these micronutrients are found in abundant amounts in fresh fruits and vegetables. According to the CDC only about 10% of Americans consume an adequate amount of fruits and vegetables in their diet. By consuming a higher amount of fruits and vegetables at this time not only will we stock up on valuable micronutrients to fight COVID 19 (and a host of other things) but it may also lead to other positive health effects linked with an increase of fruits and vegetables such as decreased weight.
2. Exercise- It is well documented that consistent moderate intensity exercise can help the immune system fight pathogens. While staying at home, exercise is a powerful weapon to fight against viruses and other pathogens. The question is what exactly is moderate intensity exercise? This could include walking at least 2.5 miles per hour, dancing, wrestling with your kids, gardening, and jumping rope. The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise a week which is about 30 minutes 5 days a week. The good thing is that most of us have the time.
3. Drink more water- How could drinking water help with your immunity? I think the better question is how much time do you have? I think most of us have time right now. When it comes to our bodies functions the name of the game is circulation. The two best things that help our circulation is exercise and water. Water carries blood throughout our bodies and blood carries oxygen. By drinking more water, we provide much needed oxygen to our cells. Oxygen is used by our immune system to create antioxidants that kill bacteria and viruses. Water also helps in removing these bacteria and viruses from our body. Water also helps circulate lymph. Lymph is how our white blood cells travel throughout our body. When lymph circulates, our body gets our immune support. Did you know our mouth is where a good portion of bacteria hang out in our body? Water keeps our mouth and eyes moist which makes it harder for these pathogens to take over in our body (flossing helps too). Water is also key in the production of serotonin and melatonin which can improve our mood and sleep. Now that we are all fired up to drink water, how much should we drink? A common rule of thumb is to drink about half your body weight in ounces. If you weigh 160 pounds you would need to drink 80 ounces a day, which is about 5 bottles of water. Another way of looking at it is since your body loses about 3-4 liters of water a day you should drink about that much water a day to replace the lost water. This may sound overwhelming to you, my advice would be to drink 1 more cup a day than what you normally drink this week and to add a cup a day each week until you reach your goal. If you are feeling enthusiastic don’t go overboard with the water. Your kidneys can only process .8 to 1 liter of water an hour. If you drink more than that you could experience water intoxication. Try to space your water intake out over the course of the day.
4. Get outside- Walking, playing or hanging out outside is a great way to boost your immune system. Your body begins to make Vitamin D after being outside for as little as 5 minutes. Vitamin D can provide a huge support to your immune system. Furthermore, sunlight has been shown to enhance fighting activity of your T cells. You could take a walk down a secluded street, have a glass of water on your patio, or do some gardening in your backyard to receive all the benefits of sunlight. Sun rays can cause damage if you are outside for too long. Make sure to use sunscreen if you are planning to be outside for a prolonged period of time.
5. Let some things go- Being at home during COVID 19 is probably different for most of us. You may think this may be a great time to chill, enjoy some comfort food like a tub of ice cream, order in from your favorite fast food restaurant, and have a Zoom happy hour with your friends. However, I would caution that now more than ever is the time to be disciplined and not give in to some of our vices. There are a few things that have been shown to weaken the immune system when taken in high amounts. Among them are sugar, salt and alcohol. When you consume large amounts of sugar your body has to use precious vitamins and minerals to process all that sugar. That means that these vitamins and minerals cannot be used to fight infection. If you make a habit of consuming sugar in large amounts on a regular basis you could decrease the effectiveness of your immune system. As discussed earlier in this article your body uses nutrients to fight infection, which would mean you need a well of nutrients to give you the best chance of fighting infection. With that being said, it would be best to consume foods with a high amount of nutrients and stay away from food that provide little to no nutrients. Many of these foods would be described as “junk food” or food that has “empty calories”. Examples of these foods would be cookies, candy, ice cream, cake, chips, fast food, or just about anything you find on the shelf of a grocery store that is processed. Studies have also shown that consuming alcohol in large amounts can weaken the immune system. Nicotine has also been shown to have a deleterious effect on the immune system. During this time of isolation, it may be best to stay away from junk food, and booze.
6. Get plenty of sleep- Your immune system is very busy while you sleep. When sleeping it gives your body a chance to focus on things such as healing and mounting an immune response because it does have a million and one chores on its plate while you are awake. For optimal sleep it is best to get 7 to 8 hours a night, preferably falling asleep between 8-10 PM. If you can’t swing this, midday naps have also been shown to be effective with the immune response.
7. Spend time with God- Quarantine can bring many thoughts and emotions, both positive and negative. We need to have the proper perspective on why these things are happening around us. This is where God comes in. One of the worst things about quarantine may simply be loneliness. However, we are not alone. This is a great time of solitude and silence that we can use to commune with our God. God brings more than just company, he brings healing. We have access to this healing by simply talking to him and meditating on his Word. There have been studies done by the University of Maryland Medical Center that show that daily spiritual practices boost your immune system. I have not conducted my own extensive research on this subject but I will give you my rationale (besides the fact that I am a Christian and just believe it.) Daily time with God increases your hope and optimism about life which should lower your cortisol levels and cause you to relax. In this relaxed state, your immune system can function more effectively. Daily spiritual practices of prayer, meditation on his Word and church attendance will also raise your sense of joy, happiness, and contentment which may also improve the function of your immune system. If you are still skeptical that this will improve your immune system and you do have a spiritual persuasion think of it this way. You have extra time on your hands. You could use it to develop a deeper connection with your God or you could spend it reading up on the latest numbers of COVID 19 deaths or anything else you may do because of the fear of what COVID 19 is doing to the world. Which one do you think will be more advantageous to your health?

I hope you have found encouragement and valuable knowledge in this article. We could use this time to worry about our health, or we could use this time to become the healthiest we have ever been.