

Ask the Pharmacist Your COVID-19 Questions

[Pharmacists](#) are medication experts and the most accessible healthcare providers. Nearly 90% of Americans live within five miles of a pharmacy. Pharmacists are trained to review all medications and identify medication problems. They also administer vaccines and conduct health and wellness screenings. Pharmacists are an excellent source of information for any questions you might have about your over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications.

I've heard several names used for COVID-19. What are the differences?

Viruses and the diseases they cause often have different names. For example, HIV is the virus that causes the disease AIDS. Coronavirus refers to a group of viruses that primarily cause breathing-related problems, including the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). COVID-19 is the disease caused by this previously unknown or novel coronavirus. Scientists have named the new coronavirus severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes COVID-19.

Will taking vitamin C protect me from getting COVID-19?

Vitamin C is a nutrient that supports your immune system. It is also an antioxidant that prevents damage caused by free radicals. When you have an infection, your body's cells may be damaged and they release harmful free radicals. Antioxidants like vitamin C block free radicals, which protects your body's cells and tissues from further damage.

In several small clinical studies, vitamin C was given to patients with sepsis, a life-threatening illness caused by your body's response to an infection. Some of these patients also had severe respiratory viral infections. Vitamin C was given in very high doses intravenously. The results of these studies found that vitamin C may be helpful, along with standard treatments, in these groups of patients. However, the number of patients in the studies was small, and further research is needed to provide clear evidence that this treatment is helpful.

No evidence is available about the use of vitamin C in people with COVID-19. However, current studies in China are investigating the use of high-dose intravenous vitamin C to see if it can improve lung function in people with COVID-19. There currently is no evidence to suggest that high doses of oral vitamin C supplements can help with the disease.

Can antibiotics help treat or prevent COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection caused by a virus. [Antibiotics](#) should be used only to treat infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics don't work on [viral infections](#). Therefore, antibiotics will not treat COVID-19 and should be used only if you have a bacterial infection.

Although both viruses and bacteria can cause infections, often with similar symptoms, they are very different. Bacteria are larger and can survive and reproduce on their own. Viruses need a host, such as a human or an animal, to survive and reproduce.

Is it safe to take ibuprofen if I have a mild case of COVID-19?

Common symptoms of a mild case of COVID-19 include fever and body aches, which can be relieved by taking OTC medications. Recent news stories warned against taking ibuprofen to reduce your fever and alleviate body aches.

Ibuprofen is an OTC nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) drug used to treat pain, inflammation, and fever. There is a speculative link between how ibuprofen works and the receptors that the coronavirus uses to infect a person, potentially leading to increased infection and worse outcomes in COVID-19 patients. This has led to theories that ibuprofen should not be used in patients with COVID-19.

However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a statement that it is not aware of scientific evidence connecting the use of NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, with worsening COVID-19 symptoms. The World Health Organization, which first advised against using ibuprofen, has updated its advice and now does not recommend against the use of ibuprofen.

There is currently no evidence to support an association between ibuprofen and negative outcomes in patients with COVID-19.

Can my blood pressure medication make me more susceptible to getting COVID-19? Should I stop taking it?

No. You should never stop taking your medications unless directed by your doctor or pharmacist.

Several reports have suggested that the place where coronaviruses attach to cells is enhanced in people who take certain medications for blood pressure called angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors or angiotensin-receptor blockers (ARBs), and these patients are therefore at an increased risk of a COVID-19 infection.

Alternatively, other reports suggest that ACE inhibitors or ARBs may protect against lung damage or may have a reduced effect in terms of virus binding.

At this time, there is no clinical evidence of harm or benefit with regards to COVID-19 infection in people taking these medications. There is a clinical trial underway to review the effects of the ACE inhibitor losartan on the heart, kidneys, and lungs of adults hospitalized with COVID-19.

The American Heart Association, the American College of Cardiology, the Heart Failure Society of America, and the European Society of Cardiology recommend that people

who are currently taking these medications should continue taking them. If you have specific questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your medications.

Will drinking tonic water protect me from getting COVID-19?

No. Quinine is found in small amounts in tonic water. Quinine has been used to treat malaria for hundreds of years. Two anti-malarial drugs, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, are currently being [investigated](#) for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. Quinine is not recommended or being studied for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19.

I use chloroquine to treat the fish in my aquarium when they get sick. Can I take my fish's medicine to keep me from getting COVID-19?

No. While chloroquine phosphate can be used to treat sick aquarium fish, it is not an FDA-approved medication. Chloroquine phosphate is not interchangeable with the FDA-approved drugs that are being studied as potential treatments for people with COVID-19 and may cause serious harm or even death. It is important never to take products from veterinary sources. Chloroquine, which is the medicine approved for humans and different from chloroquine phosphate, should only be taken as prescribed and under the direction of a doctor.

How do you get infected with the coronavirus that causes COVID-19?

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person. The spread is thought to be through respiratory droplets that are made when an infected person coughs or sneezes, and airborne droplets are breathed in. If the droplets land on surfaces, then they can enter your body when you touch those surfaces with your hand then touch your mouth, nose, and eyes. However, scientists are investigating other ways that the virus may be spread.

How do I avoid getting infected?

For now, it is important to practice physical distancing. Stay home unless you are going out to seek medical care or are getting necessary grocery items or medicine. When you must go out, be sure to practice safe distancing, which means placing 6 feet between you and others. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you leave your home, wash your hands as soon as you come back inside. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Be sure to also wash your hands after blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing. Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

Stay away from people who are sick. Clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched daily. Examples of high-touch surfaces that need to be regularly cleaned and disinfected are light switches, doorknobs, keyboards, faucets, tables, and countertops.

In addition, it is now recommended that you wear a cloth face mask every time you leave the house.

Why do I need to wear a face mask if I don't feel sick?

People with COVID-19 who have no symptoms or have not yet developed symptoms can still spread the virus to others. Wearing a cloth mask helps block the droplets that are created when you talk, cough, or sneeze, and that may contain the virus, from landing on nearby surfaces or being inhaled by others nearby.

Note: The information contained in this article is emerging and rapidly evolving because of ongoing research. Talk to your pharmacist or other healthcare provider if you have any questions about your medications, COVID-19, or other health issues.