

Selenium Deficiency Increases Risk of Viral Infections and More

Selenium is best known as an antioxidant and catalyst for the production of active thyroid hormone, and it also supports healthy moods. Nutritional deficiencies of selenium have long been associated with reduced immune system responses and susceptibility to infectious diseases.

However, recent research has demonstrated that oxidative stress in the body (specifically, deficiency of selenium) can actually lead to mutations of viral pathogens, creating more contagious and life-threatening viruses.

It's not merely coincidental that many of the most dangerous viruses originate in Asia, where soils and diets are highly deficient in selenium. With insufficient selenium available, viruses found in livestock and birds are able to jump to human hosts and mutate into more punishing forms. Think of the avian flu for reference.

As it turns out, the human need for selenium is quite small—measured in micrograms versus the standard milligrams for most supplements. Selenium is found in multi-vitamins and antioxidant formulas, which provide inexpensive protection against many health problems.

As a trace mineral, the suggested daily amount of selenium is woefully low at only 55 mcg (enough to prevent Keshan's disease); however, informed practitioners typically recommend 200 mcg per day to produce maximum benefits (not to exceed 400 mcg daily though!).

Even the highly-conservative FDA allows supplement manufacturers to claim that “selenium may reduce the risk of certain cancers.” A study in the U.S. showed that 970 men supplemented with 200 mcg of selenium daily (as selenium-enriched yeast) for 4.5 years had a 63% reduction in the incidence of prostate cancer, as well as a significantly reduced incidence of colorectal, lung, and total cancers.

Pretty impressive for a little trace mineral that costs next to nothing!

Alas, many Americans are willing to stand in long lines to receive flu virus inoculations, which provide, at best, a one-in-five chance of protection. So, as the cold and flu season unfolds, you may want to remind your loved ones to assess their selenium intake and consider supplementing with selenium.

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