DR. MICOZZI'S
INSIDERS' CURES

JULY 2020 • VOLUME XI • ISSUE 7

Why *now* is the best time to build your immunity

Plus, my top 10 foods and herbs to keep your immune system firing on all cylinders, year-round

I'm sure you've heard the warnings about a potential second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning this fall—perhaps in a different form from what we saw last winter and through spring.

Of course, the annual influenza pandemic will also be heading our way during the same timeframe.

And this disease double whammy is a big reason why you need to start building your immune system defenses right now. Because what many people don't understand is that immune health is important *all the time*—not just during cold and flu (and coronavirus) season.

In fact, it can take as much as *three months* to entirely replace worn-down immune cells with new, healthy cells. In other words, if you don't keep your immune system healthy year-round, it leaves you vulnerable to disease and infection.

So while it may seem counterintuitive, it's particularly important to make sure you're supporting your immune system during these summer months, when it's not being taxed by seasonal viruses.

Handwashing and social distancing are great, but you can do more

I'm glad most people have finally learned about practicing good hygiene through proper handwashing and social distancing—which is what I've been recommending for years to help keep your immune system healthy and to lower your risk of colds and flu… and now coronavirus.

There are also other natural, easy, and effective steps you can take to build and maintain your immunity year-round, and I'll discuss those steps in detail in a moment.

But first, let's take a look at how your immune system functions in the first place…and the No. 1 thing you should *never* do if you want to stay healthy during cold, flu, and coronavirus season.

Understanding the complicated immune system

The immune system is a complex, interconnected network of cells, tissues, and organs that reside *throughout* the body—not just in "immune" tissues.

In fact, your gut is home to the majority of your immune cells, and those cells need to be replenished on a continual basis. That's why nourishing both your gastrointestinal (GI) microbiome and your immune system is important 24/7, year-round.

But while people like to talk about "*boosting*" the immune system, the key is really more about moderating and maintaining a healthy immune balance.

That's because chronic inflammation from overstimulation of the immune system contributes to chronic diseases just as much as a poorly functioning immune system does.

In other words, as with most things in life, your immune system functions best when it's balanced.

How *not* to fight disease and infection

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, it seemed like all we heard from the talking-head mainstream experts were statements about old drugs, new drugs, and new vaccines to protect us from infections—pandemic or otherwise. (And we're *still* hearing about all this now.)

The tragedy is, we didn't hear much at all about the prescription drugs that

In this issue:

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Dr. Micozzi's *Insiders' Cures* is published monthly by OmniVista Health Media, L.L.C., 100 W. Monument St., Baltimore, MD 21201 for $74 per year ($6.16 an issue).

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Insiders' Cures, 100 W. Monument St. Baltimore, MD 21201.

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Publisher: Katherine Wheeler
Executive Editor: Amanda Angelini

actually make us more susceptible to respiratory infections. This includes the drugs I always recommend against—particularly lisinopril and other ACE blockers for high blood pressure, statins for cholesterol, and Tylenol® (acetaminophen).

Some doctors and researchers did attempt to warn the public about these drugs (as I did in my *Daily Dispatch* throughout the spring). But, immediately, big pharma got its paid mouthpieces to lay down a fog of confusion and controversy about ultimately not stopping these dangerous drugs, even in the midst of a pandemic.

Not to mention, there was very little from the public health "experts" about all of the research showing how micronutrients offer protection against infections and support to the immune system. There was some talk about vitamins C and D (see the sidebar on page 4) and zinc—but *only* when taken with antibiotics and other drugs.

Sadly, none of these "experts" even gave a cursory glance at the botanicals and foods shown by science to support immune health. (Maybe that helps explain the greater susceptibility of older people to infections like coronavirus, because poor diets and nutrient deficiencies are all too common among this at-risk population.)

Which leads me to my first recommendation for keeping your immune system healthy, naturally…

You (and your immune system) are what you eat

The foundation of the immune system (and every cell, tissue, organ, and system in the body) is diet and nutrition.

And that, of course, starts with food. Or, most notably, a healthy, balanced diet full of fresh, whole foods.

Fake foods (including plant-based, artificial "meats"), fad diets, and dietary restrictions that eliminate entire categories of whole foods do not support your immune system or health.

Nor do the "wrong" foods. In fact, refined sugars and carbs, processed foods, and artificial ingredients have been shown in study after study to weaken the immune system.

That said, there are some particular foods that research shows are especially beneficial for your immune system—both in terms of nutrients and supporting a healthy, balanced GI microbiome. Let's take a look…

Six healthy foods for top-notch immunity

1.) Asparagus is a delicious stalk that sprouts from the ground each spring. I learned this in the late 1950s, when my family moved into a new housing development outside of Philadelphia that had been built on agricultural fields for the nearby Campbell Soup Company and a New Jersey state prison farm.

Between the blades of grass for the new artificial lawns, stalks of asparagus would spring up, and I would collect them for my mother and our neighbors. I didn't know at the time that I was helping to provide immune support for our whole block.

Asparagus is a great source of vitamins A, B, C, E, and K. It's also rich in calcium and iron (which should always come from your diet alone, not supplements).

And because asparagus is loaded with dietary fiber, it's considered a prebiotic food that supports the natural probiotics in your GI tract. (Probiotics should also only come from foods, not dietary supplements.)

2.) Broccoli has as much immunity-boosting vitamin C in one cup as a glass of orange juice. Plus, UCLA researchers found that a chemical

in broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables (including cauliflower and cabbage) can help restore our immune system as we age.[1]

This chemical, called sulforaphane, switches on genes and enzymes in specific immune cells that combat disease-causing molecules known as free radicals.

3.) Brussels sprouts are another cruciferous vegetable. They look like little cabbages, as indicated by their name in French, *choux de Bruxelles*.

Brussels sprouts are loaded with vitamins A, B, C, and K; iron and manganese; and fiber. They support the GI tract and digestion, making them critical for immune support.

4.) Mushrooms are one of the few "plant-based" sources of vitamin D (although technically, mushrooms are not plants, but fungi). They're also good sources of vitamin C, potassium, and fiber.

Numerous studies show the immune benefits of mushrooms, as well as their ability to prevent and reverse many chronic health conditions.

One study of 52 healthy men and women found that eating 5 to 10 grams of shiitake mushrooms daily (which works out to less than one mushroom a day) for four weeks improved immune cell function and gut immunity—and reduced inflammation (a major hidden cause of disease and aging).[2]

5.) Peppers are a great source of vitamin C. In fact, one sweet (or bell) pepper provides nearly twice the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of C. Hot peppers are high in vitamin C too, but because they're smaller, you need to eat a handful.

Peppers start out green in color. As they ripen and develop their yellow, orange, and red colors, their content of vitamin A (beta carotene), carotenoids, and antioxidants increases, which show anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial effects. Antioxidants are also key for fighting the free radicals that can attack your immune system.

6.) Sweet potatoes are one of the best sources of carotenoids, which are transformed to vitamin A in the body. And low blood levels of this vitamin have been linked to reduced immunity. Sweet potatoes are also rich in two types of fiber that support your gut.

Four herbal remedies for immune health

Along with eating a balanced, nutrient-dense diet, you can also consume or supplement with the following herbs—all of which have been found in numerous studies to help support the immune system.

1.) Astragalus. Some studies show that this foundational herb in Chinese medicine (called Huang Qi) may support your body's production of white blood cells, which the immune system uses to fight infection and viruses.

There's also interesting evidence that astragalus may support cells in the GI microbiome, which helps promote immunity in the respiratory tract—which, of course, is crucial during cold and flu (and coronavirus) season.[3]

Recommended amount: In Chinese medicine, astragalus is taken in food quantities, in consultation with a practicioner.

2.) Echinacea. There's plenty of evidence showing this herb is effective for short-term immune system support. It increases the activity of white blood cells, which shortens the duration and reduces the severity of upper-respiratory infections.

Echinacea shouldn't be taken regularly. Rather, start only at the first sign of an infection—preferably within 24 hours after your first symptoms appear.

Recommended amount: 450 mg as a supplement, but I prefer brewing an infusion of echinacea, elderberry, and ginger, with honey and lemon, to taste. If you want to make it more of an "immune support broth," you can add turmeric and garlic.

3.) Elderberry. In the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, there was an attempt to discredit this well-established traditional herbal remedy for immunity. Indeed, there was a flurry of fake news that elderberry could make the immune system "overreact" to the virus and potentially damage the lungs. Fortunately, that was quickly debunked.

Botanical experts cited a variety of studies, including one published last year that found that elderberry extract actually blocks influenza viruses from attacking healthy cells or getting inside them.[4] (Viruses need to enter and take over the metabolic equipment of your cells in order to multiply. So, your flu symptoms are actually a result of your immune system fighting off the virus).

And, interestingly, a recent lab study shows that elderberry may have the same mechanism of action against COVID-like viruses.[5]

Prior studies also suggest that elderberry is even more effective for immune system support when combined with zinc and vitamins A, C, and D.

Recommended amount: Elderberry can be taken as a supplement or syrup, but I don't think there is sufficient evidence to recommended doses. Some extracts specify adding one or two teaspoons to a drink. I prefer to enjoy it as an infusion with turmeric, ginger, honey, and lemon. Just brew a concoction that tastes good and drink it periodically.

4.) Garlic. This herb is used as a food and as traditional medicine. In terms of the immune system, research

shows garlic supports the health and production of white blood cells. Garlic also reduces the duration and severity of infections, and helps protect against infections in the first place.

Garlic is packed with powerful sulfur-containing compounds, which account for its potency and smell. Remember, some of the first antibiotics, before penicillin became widespread, were "sulfa" drugs that used sulfur-containing compounds to fight infections. Garlic is like an ancient sulfa-drug remedy.

Recommended amount: The best way to consume garlic is as a food. It adds zest to virtually any savory dish. So be sure to incorporate it into your homemade, healthy meals as much as possible. (I'm skeptical of the over-hyped, branded garlic powder extracts, which are short on research and long on marketing.)

So, as cold, flu, and potentially coronavirus season approaches in a couple months, you *can* protect yourself—starting today.

Just follow a balanced, healthy diet. As always, you can't go wrong with a traditional Mediterranean-style diet, which is full of fresh fruits and vegetables, seeds and nuts, beans, grass-fed and -finished meat, wild-caught fish and seafood, full-fat, organic dairy (like butter, eggs, cheese, and yogurt), olives/olive oil, and alcohol in moderation.

And make sure to include my immune-balancing foods and herbs in your daily, year-round eating plan. IC

Two vitamins that may support your health in the time of coronavirus

Over the last few months, we've been barraged with questionable opinions and some conflicting evidence that various drugs could help treat coronavirus.

Meanwhile, there's actual scientific research showing that vitamins C and D may lessen the severity of COVID-19 and help people with the virus recover quicker.

Vitamin C. People with severe COVID-19 often have respiratory failure and need to be put on a ventilator. But vitamin C may help. A meta-analysis of eight clinical trials involving 685 people found that taking vitamin C reduced the time spent on a ventilator by an average of 14 percent.

I recommend supplementing with 250 mg of vitamin C, twice a day.

Vitamin D. Researchers from the U.K. evaluated vitamin D blood levels in people from 20 European countries, and found that the populations with the lowest average levels of D also had the highest numbers of coronavirus cases and deaths.

In fact, the researchers noted, "Vitamin D levels are severely low in the aging population, especially in Spain, Italy, and Switzerland. This is also the most vulnerable group [of the population] for COVID-19."

Meanwhile, researchers at Northwestern University discovered that the link between vitamin D status and COVID-19 may have to do with C-reactive protein (CRP).8 They found a possible association between low vitamin D levels, high CRP levels, and severe cases of COVID-19 in older people.

I've written before about research showing that vitamin D reduces CRP. Which is just one reason why vitamin D is always at the forefront of my supplement recommendations.

I recommend supplementing with 10,000 IU of vitamin D a day.

The Sicilian villagers' secret to living past 100

And why even the healthiest Americans aren't getting enough

I regularly report about how the Mediterranean diet is the best diet on the planet for your health. (Including immune health, as I discuss on page 4.) Indeed, for 60 years, research has consistently shown this to be true.

After all, it includes fresh, whole, nutrient-dense foods in a balanced diet. And that approach fits with nutritional science and health much better than today's ridiculous restrictive, fad diets, which avoid entire categories of whole foods altogether.

However, there's some confusion about what actually constitutes a Mediterranean diet.

Most experts agree that the diet contains plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, and seafood like anchovies and sardines. But full-fat dairy like cheese and yogurt, along with grass-fed and -finished meat (particularly lamb), are also central to the diet. As I've written before, some experts "conveniently" ignore this because it doesn't fit with their flawed and failed theories about diet and health.

But one thing that everyone agrees on is that olive oil is central to the Mediterranean diet. But here too, there's some confusion. So…what type of olive oil should you be using? And how much?

Well, here's the latest science regarding these key questions, along with an update on research showing how olive oil can help improve the health of both your body and brain.

The key role of olive oil for good health

Even in Mediterranean countries like

Italy and Spain, the extent to which people follow their namesake diet can vary. But villagers in the interior mountains of Sicily eat a strictly Mediterranean diet. And that includes snacking on olives harvested from local trees and cooking with olive oil.

These Sicilian mountain villagers are reportedly four times more likely to live past the age of 100 than their urban counterparts.[1] This makes sense when you consider that in the regions of Italy where olives are cultivated, rates of cancer, dementia, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic disease are low.

Of course, olive oil's health effects aren't just reserved for Italians. Plenty of research shows that the monounsaturated fats in olive oil can reduce everyone's risk of heart disease. Plus, the oil is rich in polyphenols and phytosterols, which have been shown in studies to protect against heart disease, type II diabetes, and some cancers.

Olive oil also contains tocopherols (natural vitamin E compounds—not just the single, isolated tocopherol typically found in supplements), which support immune function and lower your risk of inflammation, cancer, and heart disease. (Are you seeing a pattern here?)

The oil is loaded with carotenoids (vitamin A precursors) that support your immune system and help keep your eyes and bones healthy as well.

And if all of that weren't enough, olive oil is a good source of luteolin, a polyphenol that's been shown in studies to have neuroprotective effects. In fact, researchers have recently been focusing on olive oil's many brain benefits.

One study in mice found that the polyphenols in olive oil improved learning and performance on memory tests.[2] And an animal and laboratory study found that an olive oil polyphenol called oleocanthal can reduce brain toxins associated with declines in language skills and memory in humans.[3]

The oleocanthal study is one of several showing that olive oil can help protect against Alzheimer's disease. In fact, it dovetails with another study that found that compounds in the fat component of high-grade olive oil help flush out neurological toxins and keep brain cells communicating with each other.[4] This can help prevent and even reverse Alzheimer's and other dementias.

The mystique of extra virgin olive oil

One thing all of these studies have in common is that they used extra virgin olive oil (EVOO). This type of oil is derived from the first, cold-pressing of ripe olives. (Learn more about how EVOO is defined in the sidebar).

There is evidence that EVOO is higher in oleocanthal and another polyphenol known as oleacein. But a large part of the health benefits of olive oil are due to oleic acid, which is found in *all* types of the oil—not just the extra virgin variety.

You see, olive oil is complicated, containing *many* different important compounds. And scientists just happen to like studying the compounds that are more prevalent in EVOO. But you can bet the Sicilians I mentioned earlier—not to mention a bunch of other Mediterraneans—consume *all* of the olive oil from their presses (not just the limited amounts of EVOO).

In fact, they've learned that manufacturers and consumers will pay a premium for EVOO, so they ship it off, and use the other, "lower" grades themselves—without missing all the beneficial effects, so far, on their own health.

That's because what *really* matters when it comes to consuming olive oil

EVOO: How to make sure you're getting the "real deal"

Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is a shifting target, as manufacturers manipulate the market. But if you really want the high-cost, high-grade oil used in some studies, here's what you need to know.

Standards of flavor and quality for EVOO are said to correspond to antioxidant content (which in itself is a tricky concept). Some standards are set by the International Olive Council (IOC), based in Spain, but they're hardly definitive.

The IOC defines EVOO as "virgin olive oil which has a free acidity, expressed as oleic acid, of not more than 0.8 grams per 100 grams."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture goes a little further. It defines EVOO as having "excellent flavor and odor (median of defects equal to zero and median of fruitiness greater than zero) and a free fatty acid content, expressed as oleic acid, of not more than 0.8 grams per 100 grams."

It's no surprise that these somewhat subjective and wishy-washy standards have yielded a veritable vat of mislabeled (to put it charitably) EVOO. After all, isn't "excellent flavor and odor" in the eye of the beholder? (Like a fine wine, or wine vinegar.)

Five years ago, an analysis by the National Consumers League found that more than half of products labeled as EVOO failed to meet IOC standards, including olive oil from natural grocers such as Trader Joe's and Whole Foods.[9] And things haven't improved since then.

Last November, olive growers and a producer petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to adopt "science-based, enforceable standards" for EVOO and other types of olive oil. And for good measure, they recommended modern testing standards to ensure olive oil freshness.[10] But there's no word yet on what the FDA plans to do.

California, on the other hand, has a standardized testing process for EVOO that includes a chemical analysis, sensory evaluation, and olive traceability.[11] EVOO that makes the grade can carry a California Oil Council seal. So, for now, that's your best bet to ensure the EVOO you buy is truly extra virgin—if you still really want to.

is the "dose"—*not* whether it's extra virgin. And the sad fact is, the vast majority of Americans don't even get *close* to the optimum amount of olive oil for good health.

The healthiest "dose" of olive oil

In a new study of nearly 100,000 American men and women, researchers found that barely 10 percent of the participants consumed 4.5 grams of olive oil a day (a single measly teaspoon).[5]

And yet, the study found that consuming just 7 grams of olive oil a day (about half a tablespoon) decreased the participants' risk of cardiovascular diseases by an impressive 14 percent. And their coronary heart disease risk, specifically, was even lower—by 18 percent.

Meanwhile, the Mediterranean diet PREDIMED study included nearly 7,500 Mediterranean men and women, ages 55 to 80, with a high risk for cardiovascular disease.[6] The study participants' mean baseline consumption of olive oil was 38 grams per day—or more than *eight times* what the top 10 percent in the American study consumed.

The PREDIMED researchers increased some of the participants' olive oil consumption to 50 grams a day (a little less than 4 tablespoons). These participants also ate a Mediterranean diet.

Researchers followed the study participants for an average of 4.8 years. By the end of the study, they discovered that the group who consumed 50 grams of olive oil had as much as a *39 percent lower risk* of cardiovascular diseases.

And the researchers reported that for every extra 10-gram increase in olive oil consumption per day, cardiovascular disease risk decreased by an additional 7 percent.

But you don't have to consume as much as they did in the PREDIMED study to reap the heart and general health benefits of olive oil. Indeed, I recommend at least 2 tablespoons (26 grams) a day.

The best ways to choose and use olive oil

Whether you choose costly EVOO or not, there are two factors you need to consider when buying and storing olive oil…

1.) A dark glass bottle helps protect your oil from decomposition due to light exposure. So does storage in a cool, dark place. You can also buy olive oil packaged in metal drums, which keeps out all light. But whatever you do, don't choose olive oil in plastic containers. Plastics may contain toxic chemicals like bisphenol A (BPA).

2.) Once you open an olive oil bottle, it begins to degrade. That's why I recommend only purchasing as much as you'll use in three months. (Although unopened bottles of well-produced and packaged oil can stay fresh for 18 to 24 months.) You can always give your oil a taste test to make sure it's still fresh and potent. A pungent, slightly bitter taste means the oil's polyphenols are still active.

Olive oil is great for cooking because, unlike many other plant oils, it can be safely heated to 400 degrees or higher. Plus, sautéing vegetables and other foods in olive oil extracts much greater proportions of the healthy nutrients in these foods. That's why we won't cook with any other type of oil in our house. IC

How to "rewire" your brain by declaring independence from impatience and instant gratification

As July 4 quickly approaches, I've been observing that many people feel impatient with the U.S. government—especially this year.

Some of this dissatisfaction, of course, is based on the behavior of our elected officials. But I believe there are several other overarching reasons why there's so much unease with our government today.

And, as you might expect, I've come up with some solutions for that—like how you can actually help rewire your brain and improve your capacity to solve the problems that bedevil both our country and ourselves.

But before we get to that, let's look back on how history has shaped our government—and our expectations.

Our government system doesn't account for bureaucrats run amuck

When our founding fathers officially declared independence from Great Britain in July 1776, they had in mind a republic that was modeled on the ancient Roman republic. In 1787, the Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union to

form a "more perfect union."

Now, technically, the U.S. government doesn't operate as a democracy, with direct popular participation in affairs of government, but rather as a republic, through elected representatives. All of the constitutional offices of our federal government are accountable to the public through the two-, four- or six-year election cycles of our Congressional, Senate, and White House representatives.

But our founders never envisioned millions of unelected, unaccountable, lifetime government bureaucrats in cushy careers who run rings around our elected representatives—and around us. And these bureaucrats are the *real* problem with big government.

Instant information discourages deep thinking and discourse

To make matters more complicated, modern technology has "democratized" our society through instantaneous access to "information" on the internet, granting previously unheard of freedoms of all kinds. (Although there was never a more fitting use for the ancient Roman republican warning of *caveat emptor*, or "let the buyer beware.")

Former Secretary of State John Kerry—a controversial anti-war Vietnam vet, long-serving U.S. senator from my old home state of Massachusetts, and former presidential candidate and Secretary of State—recognized the impact instantaneous communication has on the government.

He once stated that it's "much harder to govern…much harder to find the common interest" in this high-speed age, pointing to "the internet and the ability of people everywhere to communicate instantaneously."[1]

Secretary Kerry and other foreign diplomats reference the Egyptian Revolution and the "Arab Spring" beginning in 2010, which coincided with the rise of the internet and iPhone in the Middle East. There was also a strong popular uprising to depose the theocracy in Iran with a democratic form of government, but the Obama-Kerry Administration did little about it.

A lesson from Adlai Stevenson

Indeed, today's information technologies deliver on-demand, narrow-cast, light-speed streaming. They condition people for instant gratification, instant answers, and instant solutions.

(There's certainly been no shortage of this during the coronavirus pandemic. I smiled ruefully at a recent political cartoon drawn by Rick McKee, in which a man sitting at his computer turns to his wife and says: "That's odd: My Facebook friends who were constitutional scholars just a month ago are now infectious disease experts."[2])

But the problem with this on-demand lifestyle is that a republican representative form of government is, as Adlai Stevenson once pointed out, *not* designed to deliver instant answers or solutions.

Adlai was the grandson of a U.S. vice president, a U.S. senator from Illinois, and the Democratic presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, running against Dwight D. Eisenhower. Adlai then served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations under President John F. Kennedy, and famously and forcefully stood up to the USSR during the Cuban missile crisis.

Once during Adlai's presidential campaign, a gust of wind blew his prepared speech off the podium (before the era of teleprompters). He quipped, "That's my bad luck; your good luck." (Sometimes I think about that when preparing my articles for my editors at *Insiders' Cures*.)

Adlai also said that our form of government "depends on giving ideas and principles a chance to fight it out." But that assumes citizens really pay attention beyond the mainstream media sound bites. And recent studies show that's simply not happening—at least not today.

Attention span shrinks for average American

Microsoft researchers surveyed 2,000 Canadians and also conducted electroencephalograms (EEGs) on 112 people to analyze their brain activities. The researchers found that since the year 2000, the average person's attention span dropped from 12 seconds to just *eight seconds* in 2013.[3]

That's actually shorter than that of a goldfish, which manages to focus for nine seconds at a time. And one shudders to think about what's happened in the years since the Microsoft study was conducted.

With the rise of social media networks like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, impulsiveness and superficiality are the new social norms. Especially among young people. Twitter has a character limit, which encourages short attention spans and superficial communications in the first place. This alone discourages any deeper analysis, discourse, or thinking.

And there's scientific evidence to back all of this up. Neuroscientists recently discovered evidence of the human brain's neuroplasticity, meaning the brain has the ability to adapt and reorganize neurons based on inputs and stimuli.

Tragically, using modern technology appears to rewire the brain so that we have shorter attention spans. We may think about more random topics, but with less depth. And we're less patient and more impulsive.

Big government isn't the solution

Back in 2010, critic and cultural historian Neal Gabler wrote about how

this kind of technological rewiring impacts politics and governance, "creating expectations that the political system cannot possibly meet."[4] He noted the contrast between the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Great Recession of 2008, prior to the current politically-created "Corona Bust."

Gabler wrote how during the Depression, "few Americans expected an immediate remedy…and, by and large, demonstrated extraordinary maturity and patience." (As many big government policies actually prolonged the economic downturn.) But today, Americans expect "instant results… and have become profoundly impatient with the pace of political change."

Of course, all of these "great expectations" of today are based on the idea that big government even has the solution (as opposed to being the source of the problems, as Mark Twain once wrote).

Everyone from Thomas Jefferson to Gerald Ford has warned that "a government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take away everything you have." And in his first inaugural address, Ronald Reagan famously said: "Government is not the solution to our problems; government *is* the problem."

In the 1990s, even the Clintons declared, "the era of big government is over." (Although they lied about that, too.)

The solution is up to you

I think the real lesson today is to depend *less* on government and the mostly mediocre, one-size-fits-all services it forces upon us. I also encourage you to limit the time you spend using smartphones, tablets, and other technologies. After all, Rodin's "The Thinker" is holding his chin, not an iPhone, in his hand.

You can also take steps to rewire your brain and restore your attention span—starting today—in the comfort of your own home. In fact, studies show that slowing down and engaging in regular mindfulness meditation benefits the brain's neurons, mass, and memory.

You can learn how to practice mindfulness in the middle of your busy lives by reading my book with Don McCown, *New World Mindfulness*. (Just head over to my website, www.DrMicozzi.com, and browse the "books" tab to order yourself a copy.)

Finally, although it seems our world has been heading in the opposite direction, we as a nation should actively use our minds to think, strategize, and constructively debate ideas.

When we do, I believe we can still find and create solutions in what is left of the free-enterprise system and the independent sector. (That will just require paying attention and the simple old Roman republican rule of *caveat emptor*.) IC

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NEWS BRIEF

Your annual guide to the season's cleanest—and "dirtiest"—produce

On page 2, I highlighted some specific foods that show impressive benefits for supporting and balancing your immune system. They also help support your gastrointestinal (GI) microbiome, which is critical for immunity and health in general.

But remember, the key to immune health is following a healthy, balanced diet. And now is the perfect time to find the fresh produce that serves as the cornerstone of an optimum diet.

As always, I recommend you choose locally grown, organic produce whenever you can—which, by law, is free of pesticides, other artificial chemicals, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

But if balancing your bank account doesn't allow for an entirely organic fruit bowl and vegetable tray, there are other ways to eat a healthy, balanced diet on a budget.

Each year, the nonprofit Environmental Working Group (EWG) compiles a list of the produce that's most contaminated (the "Dirty Dozen")—and the least contaminated (the "Clean Fifteen")—with pesticides.

I report on these lists every year. So if you only buy certain organic fruits and vegetables, I highly recommend you focus on the Dirty Dozen list. Then, you can buy conventional versions of the Clean Fifteen whenever necessary.

So without further ado, let's take a look at the 2020 lists…

Dirty Dozen
(In order of the most contaminated)

1. Strawberries
2. Spinach
3. Kale
4. Nectarines
5. Apples
6. Grapes
7. Peaches
8. Cherries
9. Pears
10. Tomatoes
11. Celery
12. Potatoes

Clean Fifteen
(In order of the least contaminated)

1. Avocados
2. Sweet corn*
3. Pineapple
4. Onions
5. Papaya*
6. Sweet peas (frozen)
7. Eggplant
8. Asparagus
9. Cauliflower
10. Cantaloupe
11. Broccoli
12. Mushrooms
13. Cabbage
14. Honeydew melon
15. Kiwi fruit

(*Note: Corn and papaya are featured on the Clean Fifteen because you can shuck the corn and you don't eat the papaya rind—but they are generally grown from genetically modified seeds. So I always recommend looking for non-GMO versions of these foods, if you find them, and you can't buy organic.)