

Choose Natural Remedies for Colds & Flu!

Cold and flu season is upon us! The late fall through early spring is typically the peak period for the most commonly-occurring viral infections; influenza-like illnesses including the flu, and upper respiratory tract infections such as the common cold. Although it can be annoying and downright inconvenient to have a cold or flu – sometimes it's our body's way of telling us something important about our state of health.

A Cleansing Cold?

Sneezing and coughing, along with a runny nose and watery eyes can be the body's way of releasing toxins, including acidic waste build-up from a year or more of accumulation. This natural process plays an important role in releasing an overburdened body of toxic load. Modern medicine continues to offer quick fixes for cold and flu symptoms, but at what cost are they to the body's natural cleansing mechanism? Let's take a look at the available symptomatic relief found in the consumer marketplace and what the overall cost to your health could be.

Drug-based Cold & Flu Medicines - Not Significantly Effective

Antihistamines, decongestants and analgesics, often combined together in a powdered form to be mixed as a hot drink, are normally used to treat the symptoms of cold and flu in the hope of decreasing nasal secretions, sneezing, congestion and sore throat. The most recent Cochrane Database Systematic Reviews (February 2012) included 27 trials with 5117 participants. This scientific review found that, although sold in large quantities for the common cold, evidence of effectiveness of over-the-counter (OTC) products containing antihistamines, decongestants and/or analgesics in, was very limited. In particular, there is no evidence of product effectiveness in young children. While these OTC products provided some general benefit in adults and older children, the benefits must be weighed against the risk of adverse effects. (1)

What are the Dangers of Common Cold & Flu Meds?

Over-the-counter cold and flu medications have multiple side effects. They commonly include drowsiness, dizziness, and possible interactions with antibiotics, blurred vision, dry mouth, gastric disturbances, and potential heart palpitations. Additionally, some patients with a cold or flu who try antihistamines for sleep experience the exact opposite effects with anxiety, sleeplessness, and agitation. **Antihistamines**, normally used to treat allergies, are used in the hope of decreasing runny nose & sneezing by blocking the action of histamine. It is more helpful to the body to allow the secretions that contain the virus to flow out of the body rather than trying to block them. **Decongestants** used to shrink nasal blood vessels in order to relieve swelling and congestion further reduces the body's natural ability to properly release viruses and toxins. Decongestants should be used with caution by those with a history of any heart disease or high blood pressure, and are not recommended at all for children under age six. **Analgesics** such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin help to relieve aches pain and fever but may mask the signs of a developing bacterial infection in the body. Aspirin and ibuprofen also cause significant mineral depletion. Minerals are essential to proper immune system function and for the maintenance of body alkalinity. A proper pH balance in the body is crucial to curbing excessive inflammation as well as preventing viruses and bacteria from multiplying and spreading throughout the body.

Healthy Immunity & pH Balance are the Keys

A healthy immune system is the best protection against colds and flu. The factors that can contribute to a less than optimally functioning immune system include poor quality sleep, excessive exercise, stress, smoking, recurring or chronic illness, or an unhealthy diet – all of which contribute to creating an acidic environment within the body's internal fluids. Since the body's natural & health-giving state is alkaline, when an acid condition prevails, cellular oxygen is decreased. Bacteria and viruses thrive in an acidic, oxygen-deprived environment and the converse is also true - they cannot survive when the pH is properly balanced to an alkaline state.

The Natural Approach

Herbs and herbal extracts traditionally have been used for centuries to help strengthen the immune system and offer relief from the unpleasant symptoms associated with colds and flu viruses. Herbs, along with immune supporting nutrients such as vitamin C and zinc, may be helpful in reducing the severity and duration of illness. In combination

with eating alkaline-forming foods these herbs and nutrients are most helpful. An easy-to-read alkaline food chart and pH paper (to help monitor your body's pH) can be found in your local health store. View the pH chart at: <http://www.prairienaturals.ca/files/R&S%20Flyer.pdf>.

Certain plant compounds have been shown in studies to have immuno-stimulating properties. They appear to help stimulate viral defense mechanisms by activating immune cells. Herbal tea mixtures or cooked decoctions have long been used in many cultures because of the synergistic effect of the herbs.

Science Supports Natural Remedies for Colds & Flu

Recent research suggests that the high molecular weight polysaccharides present in *Echinacea purpurea* have potent non-specific stimulatory actions on the immune system. (2) **Echinacea** is generally recommended to be used at the very beginning and throughout the course of an illness and then tapered off. **Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*), has been traditionally used as an immune strengthening remedy with colds and flu. Several components (e.g., rosmarinic acid and caffeic acid) are reported to possess antibacterial and "viro-stopping" properties. (3) Lemon Balm is widely used as a mild sedative to clam the nerves and producing a relaxing sleep – ideal in times of stress and infection. . Sleep deprivation is associated with disruptions of immune function. (4) **Vitamin C**, elderberry extract and zinc are a better choice than antihistamines at the start of a cold or flu. **Elderberry** binds to and prevents infection with influenza H1N1 virus. (5) Studies suggest that black elderberry can inhibit the growth of influenza viruses and shorten the duration of influenza symptoms while enhancing antibody levels against the virus. **Vitamin C** and **zinc** help to overcome an infection by strengthening mucous membranes of the nasal passages and throat from virus penetration. A Cochrane systematic review performed a subgroup analysis of 642 very healthy adults engaged in highly physically stressful activities (marathon runners, skiers, and soldiers on subarctic exercises) showed a 50% decrease in the risk of developing a cold among those who took vitamin C supplements. (6) **Vitamin D** is an important immune regulator, stimulating innate immunity and moderating inflammation, in addition to its well known effects on bone health. A suboptimal level of Vitamin D is associated with weaker production of anti- microbial proteins that work with immune system cells to kill pathogens. (7)

Taste the Power of Honey, Lemon & Ginger

Hot tea with honey, lemon and ginger is another popular remedy during winter months. **Honey** is a home remedy commonly used to treat the symptoms of respiratory infections, particularly scratchy throats and coughs. (Note: Unpasteurized honey should not be given to children younger than 2 years old.) **Lemons** are high in vitamin C, and lemon juice's anti-inflammatory qualities soothe sore throats and irritated membranes. **Ginger** helps stimulate perspiration, which cleanses the system and reduces body temperature. Like lemon, ginger has antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. Ginger also acts as a cough suppressant and has remarkable sleep-inducing, analgesic properties. In Chinese medicine, ginger is used for its warming properties.

Keep Hydrated!

During a cold or flu, dehydration can dry the respiratory mucosal surfaces. Ensure adequate fluid intake while avoiding deficiencies of essential nutrients by sipping on several natural hot lemon, honey and ginger drinks during the day and before sleep. Natural remedies can be effective as preventative or therapeutic and their use is becoming increasingly supported by enlightened healthcare providers as a safer and healthier alternative to over-the-counter cold and flu medications.

References

- (1) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22336807>, *Antihistamine-decongestant-analgesic combinations for common cold*.
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- (5) [http://drfisel.com/the_drugless_physician/2010/01 Elderberry & Flu](http://drfisel.com/the_drugless_physician/2010/01_Elderberry_%26_Flu)
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