

## **Staying Healthy During the Cold and Flu Season with Naturopathic Medicine**

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With cold and flu season quickly approaching, many of my patients have asked me how they can effectively prevent and treat the cold and flu with naturopathic medicine. **Naturopathic Medicine is a distinct, comprehensive system of healthcare** that offers numerous natural solutions for treating the cold and flu. Naturopathic doctors identify underlying causes of illness and diagnose by **taking thorough histories, performing physical exams, and ordering laboratory testing.** Least invasive and most natural therapies are utilized first to treat illnesses and stimulate one's self-healing ability also known as, *\*vis medicatrix naturae\** -- "the healing power of nature", a concept formulated by Hippocrates. Hippocrates, a physician who lived 2400 years ago is often considered the earliest predecessor of naturopathic doctors. Naturopathic medicine emphasizes the importance of identifying disease risk factors and strives to prevent a myriad of illnesses from the common cold and flu to cardiovascular disease with the use of appropriate natural interventions. Disease prevention is by far the best medicine. Rather than catch the latest cold and flu circulating in your office or classroom, you can follow the old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

The cold and flu are caused by a variety of viruses that can infect the upper respiratory tract, which includes the nasal passages, sinuses, and throat. While most colds tend to pass in about a week, the coughing, runny nose, fever, body aches, and sore throat may linger longer, sometimes giving way to other infections such as sinusitis or bronchitis. Even though we are constantly exposed to these viruses, why is it that some of us will catch a cold while others do not? One of the key contributing factors that determine your susceptibility to catching a cold or flu is the strength of your immune system. There are simple steps you can take to boost your immune system in order to prevent a cold and flu. First, eat a balanced and nutritious diet. Consume a whole foods diet balanced in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds and lean meats to provide your body with essential vitamins, such as vitamins A, C, and E, minerals, such as zinc and selenium, and protein to support your immune system. Also, taking a high-potency, high-quality multivitamin and mineral supplement daily can help ensure that you are getting the proper nutrients to fight off the cold and flu. Second, sleep at least seven hours a night. During deep sleep potent immune-enhancing compounds are released and many immune functions are greatly increased. Third, decompress from your stress. Stress increases hormones, such as adrenaline and corticosteroids that inhibit white blood cell formation and suppress the immune system. Engage in your favorite form of relaxation daily such as, walking, reading, meditation, or visualization to enhance your immune system. Fourth, exercise regularly. Thirty to forty-five minutes of moderate exercise at least three times per week has been shown to increase white blood cell activity, which will help off fight viral infections. Finally, adopt a positive attitude. Numerous studies have demonstrated that laughter and a positive emotional state can enhance the immune system. 1, 2

Even if you do develop a cold or flu, there are a number of simple measures you can take to speed up your recovery process and decrease the duration and the severity of the

symptoms of the cold and flu. Take time to rest. As stated previously, sleep is essential for enhancing your immune system. Drink large amounts of fluids, preferably water, soups and diluted vegetable juices. Staying hydrated keeps your upper respiratory tract moist and less hospitable for viruses to thrive and helps to improve the function of white blood cells. Limit your refined sugar intake. Excessive sugar consumption may significantly reduce white blood cell function. There are also several effective vitamins, minerals, and botanicals that are recommended to treat the cold and flu. Vitamin C is essential for proper immune function. Several studies have found that vitamin C reduced the duration of cold and flu and the severity of symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Since zinc interferes with viral replication in test tubes and may interfere with the ability of viruses to enter cells of the body, taken as a supplement zinc may help immune cells to fight a cold and relieve cold and flu symptoms.<sup>4</sup> Zinc lozenges with glycine as a sweetener can help provide relief of a sore throat. Echinacea (*E. purpurea*, *E. angustifolia*, and *E. pallida*) can be taken during the onset of a cold for a total of seven to ten days to stimulate the immune system and shorten the duration of a cold or flu.<sup>5, 6</sup> Oregon Grape root (*Mahonia aquifolia*) is also recommended since it may help to soothe irritated mucous membranes in the throat and has potent antimicrobial activity. Finally, elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*), shown to have antiviral activity and promote diaphoresis or sweating to lower a fever may also be considered as part of your cold and flu treatment plan.

Before you try any nutraceutical or herbal supplement, please consult with a qualified naturopathic doctor for appropriate and safe treatment and dosage recommendations.

#### References:

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