

Staying Healthy During Cold & Flu Season

By Dr. Ted Suzelis, N.D.

As we move into the cold and flu season, there are many simple things you can do to boost your immune system and reduce or avoid cold and flu symptoms during the winter months.

What is a Cold?

A cold is an acute respiratory infection caused by one of hundreds of possible viruses. It is not well understood why we get colds and why they are more prevalent in the winter months. Many people who are exposed to these viruses do not get colds, so therefore a weakened immune system is at least partially to blame for the occurrence of the common cold.

What is the Difference Between a Cold and the Flu?

A common cold will often cause a stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, a mild to moderate hacking cough, a sore throat and on occasion mild fatigue or aching. The flu will often cause a high fever (101° – 104°), a headache, moderate to severe aches and pains, severe weakness and fatigue, and sometimes a cough.

Conventional Medical Treatments

Medical doctors have very few tools to combat the common cold. Their main treatments are aimed at easing symptoms until the body can overcome the virus. Therapies most commonly used are antihistamines and cough syrups. Keep in mind that antibiotics have no effect on viral infections. When a doctor prescribes antibiotics to someone with a cold or the flu, it is only to decrease the risk of a secondary bacterial infection, such as pneumonia. When it comes to the flu, there are two methods of treatment that can be used. The most common therapy employed by medical doctors is flu vaccinations. Flu shots can be effective for many people, but they are only 40% to 60% effective in high risk populations like the elderly. The other therapy that can be employed is an antiviral drug. This is only used in high risk or severe cases of the flu. Antiviral drugs, such as amantadine or rimantadine may reduce symptoms up to 50%, but side-effects can be severe.

Natural Cold & Flu Therapies

- ? **Zinc:** Zinc is one of the most important natural therapies for colds. One recent study found that zinc nasal spray can reduce the duration of a cold by almost 75%. Using zinc this way inhibits viruses by direct contact with zinc in the nose and throat. Zinc lozenges are slightly less effective, but have the added benefit of boosting the immune system, if the person is deficient in zinc.
- ? **Vitamin C:** Vitamin C can reduce symptoms of colds when they occur and may help prevent colds. Numerous studies have found that vitamin C supplementation can reduce symptoms of a cold and help you get over a cold faster. Others have found that continued use of vitamin C throughout the winter may help prevent colds.
- ? **Echinacea:** Until the 1930's, Echinacea was the most common cold & flu remedy in the United States. It stimulates the immune system to reduce symptoms and duration

of colds, and may have mild effects on preventing colds. A 1997 study suggests that Echinacea may be able to stop a cold just as it is starting. Many people choose to use Echinacea throughout the winter, however you must make sure that the Echinacea preparation you are taking does not contain goldenseal. Goldenseal is an anti-bacterial herb and should be taken for a maximum of 10 days at a time.

- ? **Astragalus:** Astragalus has historically been used to enhance the immune system to protect people from getting colds. It also boosts the immune system during an infection to shorten the duration of the cold after someone has been exposed. Astragalus is a safe and effective herb to strengthen your immune system throughout the winter.
- ? **Elderberry:** Elderberry is a very good anti-viral that is particularly good at speeding recovery from the flu. It does so by inhibiting replication of the influenza virus. In one study, 70% of those taking elderberry were better after 2 days and over 90% of people completely resolved the infection within 3 days. This is in contrast with people given a placebo that took as much as 6 days to feel well.
- ? **Homeopathics:** Homeopathics work to stimulate the body to heal itself from colds and flus very effectively. For the most effective therapy, you need to see an experienced homeopathic practitioner to receive the proper remedy. Homeopathics can be used in long term therapy to strengthen a person's immunity to colds and flus, but can also be used during colds and flus to reduce symptoms and speed recovery. Some common remedies used for flu prevention and treatment are *Oscillocochinum* by Boiron, Flu Solution by Dolisos, and Influenzinum 2004, a remedy made yearly by Dolisos for the year's most common strain of the flu virus.

Following these suggestions may help you stay healthier during the cold & flu season, but they are not meant to replace medical treatment. Use common sense and seek the care of a medical or holistic practitioner if your symptoms are severe or are present for an extended amount of time. Please go to the hospital if there is a high fever, prolonged vomiting and/or diarrhea, or if you have a gut feeling that something is just not right.

Dr. Ted Suzelis, N.D. is a naturopathic physician with offices in Newton Falls and Canfield, Ohio. His website is www.ohionaturopathic.com