

BOTTOM LINE
Natural Healing
With Dr. Mark Stengler

DEEPER CURES FROM AMERICA'S TOP NATURAL PHYSICIAN

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Nature's Virus Killers for Colds and Flu

DO YOU HAVE TO GET A COLD OR THE FLU THIS COMING SEASON? No! This year can be different. With the right preparation, quick intervention and a lineup of powerful, natural virus fighters, there's a good chance that you can enjoy fall and winter without getting sick. Here's how...

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Colds and flu are both caused by viruses. They are spread through the air by coughs and sneezes and through contact with contaminated objects, such as a doorknob or a hand that has been used to cover a cough. A virus is little more than a clump of genetic material (DNA or RNA) inside a packet made of protein. Stray viruses constantly land on your body. The trouble starts when they attach to cell receptors and get inside your cells. Viruses use the cells' own reproductive equipment to duplicate themselves—damaging more and more cells as they churn out millions of lookalikes.

It actually is a good sign when you begin to get a stuffy head or a runny nose. Your body is fighting back. Your immune system picks up signals from the by-products of viral activity—pain, redness, swelling, heat, fever and rash are results of your immune system launching a counterattack. Mucus is

produced to help expel viral intruders.

Flu viruses are a lot more powerful than typical cold viruses. Cold symptoms are mainly confined to the head, neck and chest. Flu causes more generalized symptoms, such as fever, body aches, nausea, cramping, vomiting and severe fatigue. Flu also can develop into bronchitis. In the worst cases, it can lead to pneumonia and other severe respiratory diseases that are sometimes fatal, especially in the elderly or others with weakened immune systems.

New threat: Avian flu has been a problem in Asia and has the potential to reach the US. Because it also is caused by a virus, I would recommend the same natural approach that can be used for the regular flu

START WITH PREVENTION

I'll tell you about great ways to feel better if you get a cold or flu, but prevention should be your first line of defense...

Avoid spending time around people who already are sick, particularly if they're coughing or sneezing. If you live with someone who is sick, sleep in separate rooms. Wash your hands frequently during cold-and-flu season, and don't share towels—assign one to each family member or use paper towels. Keep your hands away from your face, especially your nose, mouth and eyes.

Take vitamins. A good multivitamin/mineral supplement provides a base of nutrients to support a healthy immune system. A formula that I recommend as a preventive against viral infections is Source Naturals Wellness Formula (to find a retailer near you, call 800-815-2333 or go to www.sourcenaturals.com). It contains vitamins A and C, which are involved in the formation of antibodies...the minerals zinc and selenium...and immune-supportive herbs, such as garlic, echinacea and astragalus, which increase the activity of virus-fighting white blood cells. The dosage used to prevent infection is two capsules daily during cold-and-flu season, taken in conjunction with your year-round multisupplement.

Reduce exposure to toxins. You are more vulnerable to viral infection when your body is "distracted" by having to deal with toxins that can damage or suppress the immune system. Toxins aren't necessarily exotic—they could include sugars and alcohol consumed to excess, fast food and other unhealthy food laced with artificial preservatives and/or pesticides. Toxins also include small but significant amounts of metals—mercury, arsenic and lead—that you can get from food, water and air pollution.

It is even more vital to eat healthfully during cold-and-flu season because you're indoors more and are exposed to higher concentrations of germs. Go easy on holiday sweets and other treats, and you will be less likely to get sick.

Many people cut back their exercise regimens in winter months—a big mistake, since exercise strengthens your immune system. Also consider sitting

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in a dry sauna once or twice a week for 20 to 30 minutes...or a wet sauna for 10 to 15 minutes. Saunas increase sweating, which excretes toxins. Be sure to check with your doctor first if you have diabetes or heart disease.

For those who get colds or the flu every year, I recommend taking a super-greens formula in the fall to remove toxins from the colon, liver and lymphatic system. It also can be taken year-round for gentle continuous detoxification. One good product is Greens+ (800-643-1210, www.greensplus.com), which contains chlorella, wheat grass, super-green foods and detoxifying herbs such as milk thistle. The dosage is one scoop a day dissolved in water or juice.

Don't forget the impact that toxic emotions have on your immune system. Anger, anxiety, resentment, loneliness and other chronic emotional difficulties trigger the release of hormones that suppress immune function. Seek support to overcome these problems if they linger.

DO CONVENTIONAL THERAPIES HELP?

At the first sign of a runny nose or scratchy throat, some people head straight to the drugstore for cold and flu remedies. However, there are no conventional drugs—available either by prescription or over the counter—that help cure the common cold. Nasal decongestants and pain medications may make you feel better, but they don't address the actual viral infection. Natural remedies also can help you feel better—with fewer potential side effects—and they simultaneously improve immune function.

For flu, on the other hand, a number of effective prescription antiviral drugs are available that may reduce the flu's severity and duration (by one or two days) if taken within 48 hours of the first signs of illness. Such medicines include *amantadine* (Symmetrel), *rimantadine* (Flumadine), *zanamivir*

(Relenza) and *oseltamivir* (Tamiflu). Possible short-term side effects range from central nervous system problems, including anxiety and lightheadedness, to decreased respiratory function and digestive upset. These antiviral drugs are not approved for children under age one.

All of these antiviral drugs except zanamivir also are approved for *preventing* the flu during outbreaks. These may benefit individuals who are immunocompromised—for example, those who have AIDS or have had organ or bone transplants. I prefer to have my otherwise healthy patients focus on effective natural therapies since they work so well and rarely cause side effects.

RELY ON NATURE'S VIRUS KILLERS

If you start to come down with a cold or the flu, my first recommendation is to change your diet. Eat lightly so that your body can focus on healing. For the first 24 hours, consume filtered water, broths and soups with lots of garlic, onions and spices, such as turmeric and cayenne, which relieve congestion, promote circulation and have a natural anti-inflammatory effect. Herbal teas (especially ginger, cinnamon and peppermint) and steamed vegetables also are good choices. When you're feeling better, move toward a more normal diet.

I have found several supplements to be effective for treating colds and flu. Consider taking these when people around you are sick or when you first feel symptoms. You can use one or any combination until you feel better. These also are safe for children when given in dosages of one-quarter to one-half of what I recommend for adults. The bigger the child, the higher the dose you can use.

Lomatium dissectum is a plant once used by Native Americans to fight Spanish flu. Preliminary research shows that lomatium has the ability

to prevent viruses from replicating and to stimulate white blood cell activity. With colds and flu, I often see improvement within 24 hours. In my experience, the only side effect has been an allergic reaction in the form of a measles-like rash in a small percentage of users. This rash disappears a few days after lomatium is discontinued.

Eclectic Institute makes a potent product called Lomatium-Osha (800-332-4372, www.eclecticherb.com), which soothes the respiratory tract. This product is 50% alcohol, so take only the dosage recommended on the label. For children, add one-quarter of the adult dosage to hot water and let it sit for five minutes so that the alcohol evaporates. Women who are pregnant or nursing should not use lomatium.

Elderberry, as shown by research in Israel, can stimulate the immune system, enhance white blood cell activity and inhibit viral replication. Flu patients have reported significant improvement within 48 hours of taking elderberry. It also helps with colds. The elderberry used in research studies is Sambucol Black Elderberry Extract from Nature's Way (to find a retailer, call 800-283-2833 or go to www.naturesway.com). Adults should take two teaspoons four times daily...children, one teaspoon four times daily.

Echinacea. Contrary to recent media reports, extracts from this plant can be effective for treating colds and flu. Echinacea makes the body's own immune cells more efficient in attacking viruses. The key is using a product that has been processed to contain a high level of active constituents. Ground-up echinacea root or leaves won't do much. The use of alcohol and water by the manufacturer to extract active components is critical to the product's potency. Also, be sure to use enough (many people don't). Two potent, well-researched products are Echinamide: Fresh Alcohol-Free Echinacea Extract, Natural Berry Flavor, and Echinamide Anti-V Formula Softgels,

both by Natural Factors (to find a retailer, call 800-322-8704 or go to www.naturalfactors.com). This echinacea has been shown to reduce the length and severity of the common cold.

If you feel a cold or the flu coming on, take 20 drops of liquid extract or two capsules every two waking hours for 24 hours, then cut back to every three waking hours until the illness has passed.

The same company makes a liquid preparation called Anti-V Formula, which contains Echinamide, lomatium and other virus fighters. It is the most aggressive product for cold and flu from the Natural Factors line and can be used instead of the other supplements. Take 1.5 ml every two waking hours for the first 48 hours and then every three waking hours until the illness is gone.

Homeopathic influenza is an intriguing remedy that I have used with success. Made from active flu strains, it stimulates the body's own defense system to resist infection. It works along the same lines as an oral vaccine, but since it is homeopathic, none of the flu particles are left in the preparation.

It can be used for prevention or treatment of flu and has no side effects.

Take two 30C-potency pellets twice daily for two weeks at the beginning of flu season (in early November). Take two pellets four times daily when exposed to flu sufferers or if you start to have symptoms. It is available from health-food stores and The Vitamin Shoppe (800-223-1216, www.vitaminshoppe.com).

Oscillocoquinum is another great homeopathic remedy for flu, which is also available from The Vitamin Shoppe, health-food stores and pharmacies or by calling 800-672-4556 or visiting www.oscillo.com. It can be taken at the first sign of flu and is the number-one-selling homeopathic flu remedy in the US.

N-acetylcysteine (NAC). This nutrient helps thin the mucus that may accompany a cold or the flu. In addition to making you feel better, NAC helps to prevent sinus and more serious chest infections. A study at University of Genoa, Italy, showed that NAC, when taken as a supplement, could help prevent as well as treat flu. The nutrient increases levels of the powerful anti-

oxidant *glutathione* in the body, which, in turn, improves immune function. NAC is available at any health-food store and many pharmacies. If you tend to get the flu every year, take 600 mg twice daily when you are around people who have the flu or if you start feeling sick yourself.

Vitamin C enhances the activity of white blood cells. I have found that taking 3,000 mg to 5,000 mg daily helps fight viral infections. However, some people get diarrhea from this amount. For immediate treatment of symptoms, start with 5,000 mg in divided doses. If loose stools occur, cut back to 3,000 mg (or even less). ■

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