10 Tips for Beating the Cold & Flu Season
by Mary Anne Giacona, Th.M.

The chill of winter is upon us! While we may look forward to roasting chestnuts by the fire, none of us are very thrilled at the thought of cold and flu season! The good news is there are things you can do to boost your immune system and prevent or remediate some of the ills of winter. Here are my top 10 with a special cold remedy bonus!

#1. A couple of the most obvious way to boost your immune system include eating a healthy diet that is low in saturated fats and high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains while avoiding high stress in your life.

#2. Since most cold and flu viruses are spread from direct contact, washing your hands frequently or using hand sanitizers are a good habit to get into.

#3. Research continues to support a link between moderate, consistent exercise and a healthy immune system by influencing the immune system response which creates a temporary boost in the production of macrophages, the cells that attack bacteria. It is believed that regular, consistent exercise can lead to substantial benefits in immune system health over the long-term. However, there is also evidence that too much intense exercise can reduce immunity and may even make you sick. The key words here are moderation and consistent!

#4. Increase your vitamin D3 intake. A 2010 study published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition had shown that children taking a vitamin D supplement during cold and flu season were twice as likely to avoid the flu and concluded that D3 may be as effective as a flu shot in preventing the flu….and if I may add, without side effects! We are partial to Metagenics or Thorne brand because of their purity and efficacy. Depending on age, recommended dosage would range from 1000 units to 5000 units daily.

#5 Introduce a good probiotic with a minimum 14 billion live organisms. The primary role probiotics play in your health is to strengthen the good bacteria already present in the gut. Adding additional healthy bacteria to the gut provides a stronger defense for immunity by assisting with reducing bad bacteria. The use of antibiotics destroys both the bad and good intestinal flora thereby compromising the entire immune system. Taking a good pro-biotic to beef up the good intestinal flora will allow those who are healthy to stay healthy, preventing illness and those that are ill to better fight off pathogens in the system.

#6 Homeopathic remedies can also be helpful in both preventing and treating cold and flu symptoms. Remedies such as Influenzinum which are reformulated annually based on the flu viruses expected to predominate that year are very effective in preventing the flu. Other remedies such as muco coccinum or Oscillococcinum are helpful in relieving the symptoms of flu.
#7 Add 400 – 1000 mg of Vitamin C daily, especially if you are not getting it in your diet. The major role of vitamin C is to protect the immune cells against free radicals and help maintain the integrity of cells.

#8 Immune enhancing herbs and essential oils can also help. At the first sign of symptoms take 2 caps of Echinacea and goldenseal every four hours. To increase benefits, open a capsule and add 3-5 drops of clove essential oil. Be careful not to spill the oil on the capsule as it is extremely potent! If you catch this early enough the combination of herbs and oils generally will eliminate symptoms in 24 – 48 hours. Other useful oils to consider: Eucalyptus for stuffy nose and congestion inhaled on a tissue will clear the sinus passages. Cassia in a cool mist vaporizer will clear the lungs, fight infection and kill any airborne organisms. Peppermint can be used a number of ways to reduce fevers naturally.

#9 Relax with a hydrotherapy foot bath. Soak your feet in hot water while wrapped in a warm blanket. Place a cold cloth on your head and relax in this position for 10-15 minutes. Avoid getting chilled after treatment.

#10 Throat/chest compresses are a useful treatment to increase circulation and white blood cell activity. Warm the throat/chest with warm towels or a hot shower. Dry the skin thoroughly and apply a thin cotton wrap to the throat or cotton T shirt to the chest that has been soaked in cold water and wrung out so it is not dripping. Cover this with a wool scarf for the throat or sweater for the chest and go to bed with this on.

Bonus: Diane’s African Cold Remedy (good for sore throats too!)

2.5 C water  
2 limes cut in quarters and squeezed (the rind)  
3-4 Tbsp grated ginger (or as much as you can handle)  
¼ tsp sea salt

Place all ingredients in a medium sauce pan and bring to a boil until the rinds of the limes becomes a pale green. Strain the mixture with a strainer or cheese cloth into a mug. Add raw honey as needed.

Drink 1 cup before bed, pile on some heavy blankets and sleep for as long as you can.

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